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MEDITATIONS

ON

OUR LAST END

AND ON

SIN AND THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

BY

BROTHER PHILIP
SUPERIOR-GENERAL OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

NEW AND REVISED EDITION

AUTHORIZED ENGLISH VERSION

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INTRODUCTION

With the exception of love, nothing more powerfully determines the human will than hope and fear. Hope supports man; it encourages and stimulates him in his progress toward virtue, by pointing out the crown prepared for him at the end of his career; fear keeps him in the path of virtue, by showing him the abyss into which he would fall should he retrace his steps or turn aside to the right or the left. Hope gives the just man a foretaste in this life of that happiness which he is meriting by his good works; fear oppresses the sinner by the anticipation of the punishments awaiting him. Hope gives us strength in the combat, and patience under trials; and when every other sentiment seems to yield to the enemy of salvation, fear is our protection in the most violent temptations, and is, in our regard, *the beginning of wisdom.* (Ps. cx. 10.)

There is nothing, then, that urges us more forcibly to advance in the right path than these sentiments of hope and fear. Now what subjects of meditation are more calculated to produce this result than those on the "last end of man"? Is it not chiefly by the consideration of the precious advantages of a good death, of the happy sentence awaiting the just, of the beauties of heaven and the unending joy of the elect, that hope is kept alive in our breasts? Is it not, in like manner, when we reflect upon the death of the sinner,

upon the judgment which he must undergo, the confusion to which he will be subjected, at the last day, and the everlasting torments of hell to which he will be condemned, that fear penetrates our souls? Is it not then we cry out, *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb. x. 31), and do we not then dispose ourselves rather to suffer any evil than deserve this greatest of all misfortunes?

It is certain, then, that meditation on these great truths cannot fail to be of great profit to us. Besides these reasons, however, there are many others which are no less weighty.

It is indispensably necessary for us to be upon our guard against the allurements of the world, and to entertain the highest esteem for all Christian virtues. Now what is more calculated to accomplish these two objects than meditation on our last end? It is, indeed, from the viewpoint of death and eternity that we discover the nothingness and vanity of earthly things, and understand the folly of attaching ourselves to them. Then it is that we can estimate at their real value sufferings and afflictions borne for God's sake, the privations imposed upon us by the religious life, the value of obedience, of chastity, poverty, and humility, and the merit of perseverance in the service of him who will be either our generous friend or our inexorable judge.

"Seek not sensible consolation in mental prayer," says St. de la Salle* "Hold to what is of faith, to that which leads to hatred and destruction of sin; to detachment from created things; to the imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the exercise of the virtues he

*Treatise on Mental Prayer.

practised." Meditation on our last end is evidently calculated to produce this result: it has made martyrs and peopled deserts; it has sustained the apostles of all nations and all times under their labors; it has restored the fervor of monasteries and led countless souls to heaven.

Was it not meditation on our last end that induced us to enter religion? Now, if it be true that all things are preserved by the principles that established them, is it not by reflection on these great truths that we shall secure our perseverance?

Thus, whatever be our point of view, we see how advantageous and even how absolutely necessary it is for us to meditate in a special manner on our last end. It is not, then, without reason that we think this work will supply a real want.

We have divided it into fifty heads, in order to have a meditation for every Monday morning not a feast day. We think once a week not too often for reflecting on these important truths. Each subject comprises three parts—the *consideration,* the *application,* and the *prayer,* and concludes by indicating the page of the book of *Résumés,* where the Brothers will find reflections that may assist them in the performance of this exercise.

Only thoughts suggested by faith have influenced us in compiling this book, which we have undertaken and completed with a view to rendering service to our Brothers. We have placed ourselves face to face with these great truths, and have endeavored to reproduce the impression which they made upon our hearts. Sometimes we express truths that are solemn, even awful;

but of what avail to disguise them, or lessen their terrors? Since they are truths which ought to be known, should we not, if we really wish to profit from them, represent them as they are, and as the Church wishes us to see them?

Besides, on this subject, we need fear nothing, for no language, however strong, can ever adequately express the terrors of God's judgments upon the sinner, or the horrors and torments of hell.

The subjects of which we treat are not adapted exclusively to religious, because it is particularly in our character as Christians that we should meditate on our last end; and therefore these meditations may be useful to all classes of persons, even those outside of the Institute.

To these meditations upon the Last End, we have added some upon Sin and the Sacrament of Penance, which may be read, if thought advisable, on confession days and in times of retreat.

We pray God to bless this little work, and make it conducive to his glory, the salvation of souls, and the advancement of all our Brothers in the path of religious perfection.

BROTHER PHILIP.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction—Meditations on Our Last End	
First Meditation—The Remembrance of our Last End	1
Second Meditation—Sin is the Cause of Death	8
Third Meditation—The Shortness of Life	14
Fourth Meditation—Certainty of Death	20
Fifth Meditation—The Uncertainty of Death	26
Sixth Meditation—The Unexpectedness of Death	32
Seventh Meditation—As our life is, so Shall our Death be	39
Eighth Meditation—Motives to Prepare for Death	45
Ninth Meditation—The Peace of the Just when Dying	51
Tenth Meditation—Trouble of the Lukewarm Soul at the Hour of Death	57
Eleventh Meditation—The Fervent and the Lukewarm Religious at the Hour of Death	63
Twelfth Meditation—God Threatens Sinners that He Will not Hear Them at the Hour of Death	70
Thirteenth Meditation—State of the Sinner When Dying	76
Fourteenth Meditation—Who Those are that Die a Bad Death	82
Fifteenth Meditation—It is Necessary to Prepare for Death	88
Sixteenth Meditation—The Death of the Just	95
Seventeenth Meditation—A Good Death	101
Eighteenth Meditation—The Last Sacraments	107

PAGE

Nineteenth Meditation—Recommendation of the Soul 113
Twentieth Meditation—The Holy Longing for Death 119
Twenty-first Meditation—State of the Body after Death 125
Twenty-second Meditation—State of a Soul that Awaits Judgment 131
Twenty-third Meditation—The Particular Judgment 137
Twenty-fourth Meditation—Jesus Christ the Supreme Judge 143
Twenty-fifth Meditation—Judgment of the Imperfect Religious 149
Twenty-sixth Meditation—Vain Excuses of the Imperfect Religious 155
Twenty-seventh Meditation—Judgment of the Just Soul 162
Twenty-eighth Meditation—The General Resurrection 168
Twenty-ninth Meditation—The Risen Dead Await their Judge 175
Thirtieth Meditation—The Necessity of the General Judgment 181
Thirty-first Meditation—Manifestation of Consciences 187
Thirty-second Meditation—The Two Sentences . 193
Thirty-third Meditation—The Last Farewell . 199
Thirty-fourth Meditation—The Reality of Hell . 205
Thirty-fifth Meditation—The Torments of Hell . 212
Thirty-sixth Meditation—The Hell of the Soul . 219
Thirty-seventh Meditation—The Hell of the Body 226
Thirty-eighth Meditation—The Eternity of Hell 232

PAGE

Thirty-ninth Meditation—Sentiments which the Thought of Hell Ought to Produce . . 238
Fortieth Meditation—Existence of Purgatory . 244
Forty-first Meditation—The Sufferings of Purgatory 250
Forty-second Meditation—Sufferings of the Souls in Purgatory at Remembrance of their Faults 256
Forty-third Meditation—Motives for Succoring the Souls in Purgatory 262
Forty-fourth Meditation—Beauty and Excellence of Paradise 268
Forty-fifth Meditation—The Happiness of Heaven 274
Forty-sixth Meditation—The Company of the Blessed 280
Forty-seventh Meditation—The Possession of God 286
Forty-eighth Meditation—The Bodies of the Saints in Heaven 292
Forty-ninth Meditation—The Happiness of the Elect is Eternal 299
Fiftieth Meditation—The Thought of Heaven . 305
Fifty-first Meditation—November 1—Feast of All Saints 311
Fifty-second Meditation—November 2—All Souls' Day 317

MEDITATIONS ON SIN AND THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

First Meditation—Sin in General 323
Second Meditation—The Sin of Lucifer and his Angels 329
Third Meditation—The Sin of Adam and Eve . 335
Fourth Meditation—The Malice of Mortal Sin . 341

PAGE

Fifth Meditation—The Effects of Mortal Sin . 347
Sixth Meditation—The Loss of God . . . 353
Seventh Meditation—Venial Sin 359
Eighth Meditation—Sin in a Christian . . . 365
Ninth Meditation—Sin in a Religious . . . 371
Tenth Meditation—Relapse into Sin . . . 377
Eleventh Meditation—The Prodigal Son . . 383
Twelfth Meditation—The Mercy of God . . . 389
Thirteenth Meditation—Jesus Christ Destroying Sin 396
Fourteenth Meditation—The Saints and Sin . 403
Fifteenth Meditation—Jesus Christ and Sinners 409
Sixteenth Meditation—Institution of the Sacrament of Penance 415
Seventeenth Meditation—Benefits of the Sacrament of Penance 421
Eighteenth Meditation—Preparation for the Sacrament of Penance 427
Nineteenth Meditation—Contrition 433
Twentieth Meditation—The Sentiments of a Repentant Sinner 439
Twenty-first Meditation—Qualities of Confession 445
Twenty-second Meditation—Satisfaction . . 451
Twenty-third Meditation—Avoiding the Occasions of Sin 457
Twenty-fourth Meditation—Necessity and Qualities of Conversion 463

MEDITATIONS ON OUR LAST END

FIRST MEDITATION

THE REMEMBRANCE OF OUR LAST END

In all thy work remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.—Ecclus. vii. 40.

CONSIDERATION

Let us imprint deeply on our minds this truth which the Holy Ghost teaches us by the mouth of the Wise Man. Yes! if we reflect deeply upon our last end, upon death, judgment, heaven, purgatory, and hell, we shall never sin.

Experience teaches this. Let us question our own memory. Very often, alas! we have offended God; but was it not because we diverted our thoughts from death and its consequences? What a number of faults should we not have avoided if, when the devil tempted us to commit them, we had considered the infinite happiness which we were then imperilling, and the rigorous judgments which we were then preparing for ourselves!

It was from meditation on their last end that the

saints derived strength to resist the greatest and most dangerous temptations. Some, like St. Jerome, closed their ears to the suggestions of the devil, imagining that they heard the trumpet of the angel calling all men to the general judgment; others, like St. Martinian, opposed to the fire of concupiscence the inextinguishable fire of hell, whose horrors they vividly pictured in their imagination.

The martyrs triumphed over all sinful allurements, by fixing their inward gaze upon the ineffable happiness of the elect and the everlasting torments of the damned. St. Justin, speaking in the name of the persecuted Christians, says: "We wish for nothing so much as to suffer for Jesus Christ, that we may be preserved from hell and may merit heaven. If you knew," he adds, "what the everlasting fire of hell is, and what are the delights of paradise, you would envy the happiness of those who, for justice's sake, are tortured by fire and the rack; you would despise the death of the body, and fear only the eternal death of the soul, and the fire that will never be extinguished." St. Polycarp replied to his judges: "You threaten me with fire that burns for a time, but you know not of the future judgment and the everlasting fires kindled by the justice of God." In this manner did almost all the martyrs express their sentiments. We learn from their example that neither man nor devil could draw us into sin were we profoundly impressed with the thought of our last end.

Who, indeed, would dare offend God if he reflected that death might surprise him in the commission of sin, and transport him to the tribunal of Jesus Christ,

without leaving him time to repent? Who would dare sin if he thought of the terrors of a wicked death, the sentence of damnation, and the endless torments reserved for sinners? Who would dare sin if he imagined himself hanging over the abyss of hell, suspended by a thread from the hands of God, that omnipotent Master whose holy law he is tempted to violate?

Who would dare sin if he thought of heaven, with its pure, everlasting, and ineffable joys, compared with which all the pleasures and riches of this world are only dust and pollution?

No! Assuredly he would never sin grievously and deliberately, whose soul was penetrated with the thought of his last end, and who, in all his undertakings put himself in presence of death, and asked himself what at the moment of death he should wish to have done. The remembrance of his last end would soon dry up in his heart and soul the source of all his vices, and raise a barrier against all the inclinations of corrupt nature.

And, indeed, what sin could then find entrance into his soul? Could it be pride? No; for, filled with the thought of death, he well knows that he is nothing, that he should attribute nothing to himself, that God alone deserves all honor and glory.

Will he become attached to the goods of this world? Assuredly not, when he continually remembers that all his possessions must pass from him at death, that he enjoys them not as absolute owner, but for a little time as their steward, and that he must render an account of his trust. Then he will understand that all the treasures of earth are nothing in comparison with

the heavenly treasures which he is called to possess forever.

Will he follow the attractions of sense? Will he give ear to the suggestions of the devil? Will he suffer attachment to creatures or love of pleasure to enter his heart? No; because the thought of the judgments of God, of the severity of the punishment inflicted on the sensual, will seize him with fear and trembling; and, very far from committing such actions as would expose him to endless torments, he will rather condemn himself to all the austerities of a rigorous penance.

If a religious man, will he regret the world that he has quitted? On the contrary, he will look upon his vocation as the safest way to eternal salvation. A thousand times will he bless the giver of all good things for having withdrawn him from the world, and from all in it that might have been to him an occasion of sin and everlasting damnation.

Not only does he who reflects on his last end avoid sin, but he advances with ardor in the practice of all virtues. He knows that life is the time for sowing, and that death is the season for gathering in the harvest. He employs all his time in doing good, and enjoys in advance the happiness of the faithful servant whom the Master, when he comes, finds watching. He loves God above all things; he joyously consecrates to him all the thoughts of his mind, all the affections of his heart, and all the impressions of his senses. He lives every day as he would wish at the hour of death to have lived.

APPLICATION

Convinced that the devil, the world, and the flesh could never acquire a mastery over him who, by meditation, should keep his last end ever present to his mind, or who would recall this thought in moments of difficulty, let us, at the first approach of temptation at the first idea of sin, or suggestion of guilty pleasure, be careful to ask ourselves what would become of us were we to die in the commission of sin, or immediately afterwards, without having time to repent. O what strength and courage would not this thought give us to drive far from us the enemy of our salvation!

Let us think of our last end when we are about to receive the Sacrament of Penance. What is more calculated to inspire us with contrition for our sins, and with the firm purpose of never again committing them? Let us think of our last end when we encounter difficulties that must be overcome, trials that must be borne. How many sacrifices, even those hardest to make, would seem to us both light and easy if we considered them in their relation to death and judgment!

Let us think of our last end when we feel tempted to yield to weariness, and to enter on the fatal path of tepidity, and we shall be incited to return to our first fervor and regularity. Let us think of that death that we must meet, that judgment that we must undergo. Let us think of heaven, where we shall dwell eternally, if we have lived holily. Let us think of hell, and those frightful torments that are the everlasting pun-

ishment of all who die enemies of God; and, as St. Teresa counsels, let us often go down there while living, that we may not after death be cast into its fires.

PRAYER

I know, O my God, that I should not have been so cold and remiss in thy service, had I not neglected to meditate upon my last end. But I will repair this in future. I will endeavor to dry up the source of all my sins by remembering the eternity that awaits me. I will frequently ask myself, "How, at the hour of my death, shall I wish to have acted, and I will try to perform all my actions with the greatest fidelity to thee. This is the grace that I earnestly ask of thee, O my God, by the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the intercession of his most holy Mother.

Résumé, page 164.

Nothing is better calculated to make us avoid sin and practise virtue than the remembrance of our last end:

1. The Holy Ghost himself teaches this.
2. Experience proves it.
3. How can we commit sin, and think of death, of judgment, of heaven, of hell, of eternity!
4. The remembrance of our last end prevents sin in its very origin by directly combating pride, covetousness, sensuality.
5. It moves us to practise virtue. We are disposed to make sacrifices in time when we remember eternity.

—Let us then think often of our last end; above all:

1. In moments of temptation.
2. When we are preparing for confession.

3. When the occasion for any sacrifice presents itself.

4. When we feel inclined to tepidity.

5. In the morning, when we rise, . . in the evening, when we retire to rest.

SECOND MEDITATION

SIN IS THE CAUSE OF DEATH

In what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.—Gen. ii. 17.

CONSIDERATION

Man was not created to die. Being the image of God, he should to some extent share in God's eternity, and so escape the ravages of time. Indeed, in the terrestrial Paradise, Adam and Eve were not subject to suffering, sickness, or to any of the evils that afflict us. The subjection of their body and its senses to the spirit, made the service of God sweet and easy to them. All creatures obeyed them. Death could not approach the garden of delights in which they dwelt, and which they were to quit only to be placed in the abode of everlasting happiness. By the fruit of the tree of life they would always have preserved vigorous health, and maintained themselves in perpetual youth. Such was the original order which sin, alas! was soon to overturn.

God subjected Adam and Eve to a trial. *Of every tree of paradise, thou shalt eat,* said he to Adam, *but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.*[1]

Nothing was easier than to give this proof of obedi-

[1]Gen. ii. 16, 17.

ence which he demanded of them, and to which they were inclined by love for their Creator and gratitude for his benefits, as well as by their fear of death and their natural dread of the destruction which he pointed out to them as the sanction to his commandment. But giving ear to the suggestions of the infernal serpent, or yielding to a criminal complaisance, they preferred their own satisfaction to the will of God, and ate of the forbidden fruit. From that moment they lost their prerogatives, and severed their relations of love with God. Seeing in him then only an angry Master, and overcome with shame, they concealed themselves, seeking to avoid his presence. But soon they heard his voice, and the words that rang in their ears are those of a malediction, whose effects were to last through ages. *Cursed is the earth in thy work,* said the Lord to Adam. . . . *In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken, for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.*[1]

Such was the sentence passed upon our first parents, and in them upon their unhappy posterity. They sinned, and as a consequence they and their descendants have been condemned to an inevitable death. *By one man,* says St. Paul, *sin entered into this world, and by sin, death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned.*[2]

Adam and Eve saw Abel, their best beloved son, stricken down by death; a little later the same fate met themselves. So is it with all men. Death reigns as sovereign over them. Sin has placed in his hands a

[1]Gen. iii. 17, 19. [2]Rom. v. 12.

sceptre of iron, which every living thing here below must obey.

Who, then, will not hate sin which is the cause of so great misery? We weep over the ravages of death, over the ruin which it has wrought; let us weep still more over that which introduced it into the world and gave it its power. Let us hate sin with all the horror which so great an evil should inspire.

Let us be well persuaded that sin is death: death to the soul, and the source of death to the body; death to individuals, and death to society. If it reigns in a community, a city, a state, all there is confusion, all is destruction: soon nothing will be left but ruins. Is not this the teaching of history as to all times and all nations? Is it not a fact of universal experience?

Yes, we shall all die, for we are all children of a guilty father; and the day is perhaps not far distant when it shall be said of us, as of so many others: "He is dead, he has ended his career here below; he has entered upon his eternity: he is dead."

Yes, we shall die, because we have all sinned in Adam, and in ourselves. We shall die, because we all have within us that which is the cause of death, sin. To each of us, as to our first parents, it has been said: *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*[1] We shall die, because the poison of sin within us is deadly, and must necessarily produce fatal consequences. We shall die, because we are sinners, and because, as Saint Paul teaches, *the wages of sin is death.*[2]

[1]Gen. iii. 19. [2]Rom. vi. 23.

APPLICATION

Let us adore the justice of God in pronouncing and executing the decree that condemns guilty man to death. Let us deplore our miseries, but above all, let us deplore their source.

We frequently shudder at the sight or thought of death. Let us not forget that sin caused this evil, that sin subjected all the children of Adam to this penalty, and let us, therefore, hate sin even more than death itself. Above all, let us hate it because it offends an infinite God. It is on this account far more to be deplored than all the evils that follow in its train.

Let us prove our hatred of sin by our care to avoid it. Let us fear even the smallest sins. Let us carefully shun every occasion of offending God. We take many precautions against death; have we not far more reason to keep sin at a distance from us? Let us fear even its shadow. Let us ask this favor through the intercession of Mary, whose foot has crushed the serpent's head, and whose all-powerful protection will secure our triumph over all the efforts of the devil to drag us into sin, and through sin into everlasting death.

Following the example of our first parents, let us repent of our sins. With a view to satisfy Divine Justice, let us accept with resignation all the sufferings and trials of life, and even death itself to which we are all condemned. Let us imitate the saints, who not only accepted death with resignation, but even longed for its coming. They wished to pay their debt to God, and to offer to him in union with their dying Savior,

the homage of their adoration. Besides, they had the unshaken hope of a glorious resurrection. They knew that Jesus had destroyed sin, and led death captive. They believed that he had limited its power and broken its sceptre, and, with St. Paul, they cried out: *O death, where is thy victory?*[1]

Like them, let us hope for the resurrection on the last day, and prepare ourselves for it by the practice of virtue. Let us esteem the life of grace, and by our perseverance therein secure for ourselves the life of glory. Let us so act that, in the words of St. Paul, *as sin hath reigned to death, so also grace might reign by justice unto everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*[2]

PRAYER

I adore thee, O Sovereign Master, passing upon us the sentence of death. I know that I have sinned, and I acknowledge the justice of thy sentence. Let my body then be reduced to dust, since it has been an instrument of sin; but have pity on my soul, and receive it in thy mercy. O my God, I offer thee my life, I sacrifice it to thee. One thing only do I ask, namely, to recover and thereafter preserve the innocence of my baptism, that I may live and die in thy love.

Résumé, page 164.

Let us consider death in its true cause.

1. Man was not created to die.
2. Nourished by the fruit of life, he might have lived forever.

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 55. [2] Rom. v. 21.

3. But he lost innocence, and with it its prerogatives.

4. God, being angry with him, said: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

5. Ever since that day death reigns supreme here below.

—Meditating on these truths:

1. Let us adore the justice of God.

2. Let us bewail the misfortunes of men, but especially sin, which is the cause thereof.

3. Let us have a horror of sin, and fly from its very shadow.

4. Let us accept death in expiation of our sins.

5. Let us reanimate our hope in the resurrection, for Christ, in destroying sin, destroyed the power of death.

THIRD MEDITATION

THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE

For what is your life? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away.
—James iv. 15.

CONSIDERATION

What is man's life upon earth, and who will make us comprehend how transient it is? Is it not like a shadow which eludes our grasp, a vapor which is scattered by the slightest breath? Do not our days pass away like the swift waters of a torrent, whose course nothing can stop?

O how quickly we disappear from this world: the great as well as the lowly and poor, the learned as well as the ignorant, all are hurrying on to death! For all of us, life is but a step from the cradle to the grave. Some men make a little more noise than others, but they pass away with equal rapidity.

How many generations have already succeeded one another on this earth, so justly called a place of passage? How quickly everything changes and even disappears! Which of us, on revisiting, after an interval of a few years, the place where he once lived, is not astonished and even amazed at the changes that have taken place and at the numbers whereof he is told: "They are dead!"

The world, according to St. Paul, is only a figure, a representation which is neither substantial nor permanent. It is, as it were, only a stage which every one occupies for a few moments while performing his part, and then gives place to another, who also quickly disappears in his turn.

We appear and disappear almost at the same instant. Death hastens to us, and we hasten to it; every instant every step, every breath, brings us nearer to the moment of death. I make a motion of my body, I utter a word, I breathe a sigh, and that motion, that word, and that sigh, are so much taken from my existence. Our life is so short that we may consider as present the moment that will end our earthly career. Soon we shall repeat the words of the holy King Ezechias: *My generation is at an end; and it is rolled away from me, as a shepherd's tent. My life is cut off, as by a weaver; whilst I was yet but beginning, he cut me off.*[1]

How do the years that we have already lived now appear to us? Those that are yet to come seem indeed to be something, but when we shall look back upon them, they will be no more than a dream that has fled. The bark that goes down a stream, leaves behind on the waters a furrow that soon disappears. Just as quickly will the years that remain to us glide by, if indeed there are years still in store for us.

What do the saints in heaven think of the length of life? What do the damned in hell think of it? Let us pass the same judgment with them: it is the only true one. With reason has the Scripture said: *Man,*

[1]Isai. xxxviii. 12.

born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state.[1] We indeed pass away like the waters of a river which never return to their source. Our life is so short that it may be compared to a summer cloud, which is seen for a few hours and then vanishes out of sight.

Let us be profoundly convinced of the truth of these salutary maxims, and let us regulate our conduct by them. Do we not see that what has happened to those who have gone before us, will soon happen to us? They have inhabited the same cities, the same houses as we; they have possessed the same advantages that we now possess, and they are dead! And in passing from this world to the next they carried with them nothing but the virtues which they had practised, or the crimes of which they were guilty.

Let us then understand that he is happy, a thousand times happy, who, considering the shortness of life, and viewing all things with the eyes of faith, despises what is transitory and clings only to what is permanent. Let us say with all the saints: "Thy years, O God, are eternal; those of man, thy creature, are fleeting; for the instant that ends them seems all too soon to follow that which began them. Thou hast ordained it so; that, detaching his heart from all that surrounds him, he might fix his affections wholly upon thee, the only unchangeable good, and regarding the moment of death as present, be always ready to appear before thy tribunal and render an account of his works."

[1] Job xiv. 1, 2.

APPLICATION

The moments of our existence escape us almost before they seem to have begun; and yet, alas! we think so little of this, that we seem scarcely to notice it. We are like travellers descending a rapid river, who, deceived by their senses, would persuade themselves that its banks were moving from them, but that they themselves were stationary. Wholly intent on what is passing around us, we do not reflect that we ourselves are passing away, and that we shall soon have disappeared from this world.

And yet of what immense value are those moments that so quickly glide away! Each of them might purchase for us an eternity of happiness, and each, alas! might also be the beginning of an eternity of misery. Let us, therefore, be convinced of the importance of employing them all well, and let us be careful to make a right use of them.

What should we think of a poor man who, having for a few minutes permission to take out of the treasury of a rich man all the gold and silver that he wanted, should employ the time in gathering up trifles and children's toys? Doubtless we should blame him severely, and treat him as a fool. And yet are we more excusable, do we act more wisely when we lose the time that God gives us, although we know that it is short and uncertain, and that by using it properly we shall merit eternal happiness? A diamond would appear very precious to us if it would enable us to purchase a kingdom. Now, every moment of life is such a diamond, since every moment can merit heaven for us.

The damned would be happy could they recover a single one of the moments which they have lost; nay more, they would joyfully endure unheard of torments for millions of ages. Let us learn from their sad experience how to value and employ the days of grace which God gives us, and which at any moment may end by death.

O how blind we are in not profiting by the present, which alone is at our disposal! In the great affair of our salvation, we count upon a future that may never be ours. Let us not, then, put off till to-morrow what we can do to-day; for to-day goes never to return. Perhaps, too, for us there will be no morrow. Let us not become attached to any thing in a world which we are so soon to quit; let us set our affections on a world whose happiness will never end. Let us bear with patience the evils of this life, for whatever they may be, they cannot last long. A few moments of suffering patiently endured will merit an eternal weight of glory.

PRAYER

Grant, O my God, that impressed with the shortness of life, I may always be ready to appear before thee; that I may prepare for every confession and communion as if it were to be my last; that death may find me filled with fervor and love for thee. This grace I ask of thee, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Savior, and through the intercession of Mary, to whom I say with all the affection of my soul: "O holy

Mother of God, pray for me now and at the hour of my death."

Résumé, page 165.

Life is short: death is approaching, and we are hastening to meet it.

1. Generations pass away to make room for others.
2. We are only some moments on this earth, so justly called a place of passage.
3. What do the years we have already lived now seem to us? Just as quickly shall those which remain to us pass away, even if we yet have years to live.
4. What do the saints in heaven, or the damned in hell, think of the length of life?
5. O how justly does Scripture compare it to a passing wave, . . . to a flower that blooms but to fade!

—But since life is so short:

1. Let us employ every moment of it well.
2. Let us consider its end as very near.
3. Let us always be ready to appear before God.
4. Let us attach ourselves to nothing on this earth.
5. Let us suffer with patience all earthly ills, thinking of their short duration and the glory which they merit for us.

FOURTH MEDITATION

CERTAINTY OF DEATH

Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die, and not live.—Isai. xxxviii. 1.

CONSIDERATION

All men shall die; it is a decree passed by Truth itself upon Adam and all his posterity. No one shall escape this sentence: *Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.*[1] Almost all the truths of religion have been attacked by its enemies, but none of them has dared to say: "I shall not die." If, indeed, any one should have the hardihood to say so, he would be convicted of falsehood by the experience of six thousand years, in every country of the globe; he would be accounted a fool by every one, and very far from feeling certain of what he said, he would, with reason, be in dread, lest death might strike him on the instant, and punish him for his rashness.

Yes, we shall all die, the great and the lowly, the rich and the poor. Every one of us, therefore, should look upon himself as a criminal condemned to death and waiting in prison for the hour of execution. No one, up to this day, has been exempt from death, and

[1]Gen. iii. 19.

no one till the end of time shall escape its summons.

Samson with his strength, Solomon with his wisdom, Alexander with his victories, Cæsar with his triumphs, and Crassus with his riches, have been forced to yield to it: it has respected none; it will respect none. What has become of the multitude of men that have peopled the earth since the beginning of time? Their bodies are reduced to dust; they are dead. What has become of those lovers of the world, those rich and powerful men of earth, who seemed to be established here forever? They are dead. What has become of men in lofty stations, of the heroes whose names are handed down from generation to generation? History tells us, for she always closes the recital of their glorious deeds by mentioning the period of their death.

What has become of those relatives and friends with whom we ourselves have lived? They are dead. All from their graves cry out and repeat unceasingly: "Yesterday for us, to-morrow for you. Yesterday it was our turn; to-morrow it will be yours. By descending to the grave we have shown you the way; you, too, will soon point out to others the road which they must follow. We are dead, because we were dust and ashes; you shall die, because you also are dust and ashes. We have undergone the sentence passed upon guilty man; you too will soon experience its effects." Such is the language of those whom we survive, and nothing can be more certain than the truth which it intimates to us.

All the events of life are uncertain; but death which ends them all, is absolutely certain. I know not whether the infant just born will be happy or wretched,

wise or ignorant, of a robust or of a delicate constitution; whether he will be cut off in the spring-time of life, or will attain to an advanced old age; but what I do know beyond dispute and can certify to without danger of error is—that he will die. A person may escape once or often from disease; he may be saved from fire or water, from a bloody battle-field or from imminent peril; but escape being the victim of death, he cannot; the sentence is passed: *All men must die.*

Yes, we must die; the sentence passed on guilty man must be executed upon us all. This body of which we are so careful will be reduced to dust; these eyes, so quick at discerning form and color, shall see no more; these ears, so delicately formed, shall hear no more; these hands, so pliant, shall work no more; these feet, so active, will never more transport us from place to place. Yes, the day will come when our body, stretched upon the bed of death, will become to all an object of horror and danger; they will make haste to bury it deep in the earth. Some, it is true, will assist at our funeral; but after having sprinkled some drops of holy water upon the grave, they will go away, every one to his own business. If some one shall ask them the news, they will answer: "He is dead!" Perhaps all will end there; the most absolute silence may be maintained regarding us, and in a little while no one will know that we have ever existed.

I die daily,[1] says the Apostle of the Gentiles; let us repeat the same words. What is life but the introduction to death? Every day we are dying until the day of our death, when we cease to die. We feel that we

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 31.

are advancing to our inevitable doom; that we are approaching with ever increasing swiftness the abyss of death. Every day brings us nearer and nearer to its yawning depths.

Nothing, indeed, is more certain than death. We all know it, but perhaps we do not all learn the lessons to be drawn from a truth so well established.

APPLICATION

We must die. We should, then, be resigned to death from motives of faith; we should accept it with a view to satisfy for our sins. We should accept it at the hour, and under the circumstances ordained by God, placing ourselves absolutely in the arms of his Providence.

We must die; consequently we are not made for this world, which we must soon quit. What folly then to be attached to it, to seek repose in it, to give ourselves up to its joys, to become enamored of creatures from which death must separate us, to take excessive care of our body which is soon to become the food of worms, at the same time to be little solicitous as to what will befall us in the life to come!

We must die; let us then be prepared. Nothing is of more importance to us. The saints understand this, and consequently they gave themselves far less concern about prolonging their life than preparing seriously for death. Encouraged by their example let us keep ourselves in the state of grace, that when God calls us to himself we may be pleasing in his sight.

We must die; let us, therefore, often reflect on this

truth, and above all, in times of temptation; for then the thought of death is extremely profitable to us.

A holy religious was once asked: "Why have you such contempt for the world, its customs and vanities? Why are you so careful to shun its praises and honors? Why do you treat your body with such severity?" And to all these questions he answered, "It is because I must die; because I wish for one thing only, to die well."

Let us cultivate the same dispositions. Let us turn away mind and heart from the vanities of earth. Let us remember that we are destined to possess in another life the only true good. Created for immortality, let us disregard what is transitory: let us become attached to that only which is permanent, that is, to God and the things of God.

O how we shall rejoice in such conduct on the day that will end our career, when the Sovereign Master, whom we have faithfully served, will call us to share in his endless felicity!

PRAYER

Since thou hast decreed it, O my God, I must die. The sentence pronounced by thy justice must be executed upon me, and I submit to it with all my heart, in order to satisfy for my sins. But I beseech thee, O my God, make this act of resignation profitable to me, and grant that I may be a victim truly worthy of being offered to thee.

Help me, O Lord, to recall frequently the thought that I am always nearing the inevitable abyss of death, and grant by thy grace that, understanding the noth-

ingness of the creatures from which I must separate, I may cling to thee alone, who wilt be my possession and my happiness for ever.

Destroy in me every inclination that could withdraw me from thee, every inordinate affection for my body, which must one day return to dust. Cut, burn, destroy this miserable flesh, which has so often been an instrument of sin; make me a holocaust for the entire accomplishment of thy designs upon me. Happy indeed shall I be if the oblation of my life which I now make thee, will draw down upon me thy mercy, and render thy judgment favorable when I am called to appear before thee. Amen.

Résumé, page 165.

Nothing is more certain than death.

1. "It is appointed for all men once to die," says the Holy Ghost.

2. Men have denied all truths but this one.

3. The history of the world proclaims it on every page.

4. The facts of which we are witnesses recall it every moment to our minds.

5. Do we not feel ourselves dying?

—Yes, we must die. It is necessary, then:

1. To be resigned to death at the moment and in the circumstances that God may decree.

2. Not to attach ourselves to this perishable life.

3. To prepare for the hour when it shall end.

4. To trouble ourselves less about what may prolong it than about what may secure a good death.

5. To understand well that all here below is vanity, that it is folly to attach ourselves to what passes away, that those only are wise who ever keep their last end in view.

FIFTH MEDITATION

THE UNCERTAINTY OF DEATH

You know not the day nor the hour.—Matt. xxv. 13.

CONSIDERATION

Just as the fact of death is certain, so the moment and circumstances of death are uncertain. We shall all die, nothing is more certain; but as to when we shall die, we know nothing. Perhaps it will be to-day. Perhaps our present employment is the last, in which we shall be engaged and we shall appear before God before it is ended. Before another hour shall strike, the fate of multitudes will be fixed for eternity; and it is possible that we may be of the number.

Alas! how many persons have been deceived and snatched away from life when they least thought of death! What guarantee have we that such will not be our case? *Watch,* says Jesus Christ; *because you know not the day nor the hour*[1] of your death; you know not whether it will be *at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning.*[2] . . . And I say to you *watch ye, therefore, because ye know not at what hour your lord will come.*[3] . . . *Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart,*

[1]Matt. xxv. 13. [2]Mark xiii. 35. [3]Matt. xxiv. 42.

my lord is long a coming, and shall neglect his duty, his lord will surprise him, and bid him be cast into outer darkness, *there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*[1]

Let us then strive to understand these teachings of our Divine Savior, act conformably to them, and keep ourselves always in the state in which we should wish him to find us when he calls us to himself.

Not only is the hour of death uncertain, its place, date, and circumstances are equally uncertain. Where shall I die? Will it be in my bed? Will it be in the fulfillment of my duty? Will it be in the house in which I now live, or in another in which I may chance to be? Will it be in the city or in the country? In truth, I know not. All is uncertain.

"Such a one fell by the sword," says the author of the "Imitation;" "another was drowned, another falling from on high broke his neck; this man died at table, that other came to his end at play; some perished by fire, some by the sword, some by pestilence, some by the hands of robbers."[2] Death then comes in many forms, and no one can know with certainty in what way it will come to him.

I shall die, but under what circumstances? Shall I have the use of my reason and my speech, or shall I be deprived of them? Shall I receive the aids of holy Church, or shall I die without the Sacraments? Shall I be in the state of grace, or in the state of sin? I know not; therefore am I seized with fear, O my God, and I beg of thee to grant me thy help, that laboring without losing heart in the work of my salvation, I

[1]Matt. xxiv. 46, 48, 51. [2]Bk. i. Chap. xxiii. 7.

may every day prepare for death. This I know is the most certain means of being ready to die, however sudden may be the call.

Blessed then, a thousand times blessed is he who, like the wise virgins, keeps his lamp trimmed and burning, that is to say, who perseveres in fervor; or who, like the faithful servant spoken of in the Gospel, is always in readiness to receive his Master, at whatever day and hour he may come; for he shall be admitted to the eternal banquet. But woe, a thousand times woe, to him whom death shall find ill prepared! Woe to him whom it shall surprise in mortal sin! He shall be hurled into the abyss of hell forever. O how senseless we are when we fail to keep ourselves in readiness for this terrible passage, which we may be called upon to make at any moment, whilst we are promising ourselves a long life—we who cannot count with certainty upon a day or an hour!

APPLICATION

Since the time and the circumstances of our death are uncertain, let us not count upon the future. Let us profit by the present, which alone is at our disposal, and employ it to put and keep ourselves in a state of readiness to appear before God. Let us be prepared to die at any hour. "Let the remembrance of eternity never depart from your thoughts," said St. Anthony to his disciples. "Think each morning that perhaps you will not live till the end of the day; think every evening that perhaps you will never see the morrow. Perform each of your actions as if it were to be the last

of your life; that is to say, with all the fervor and piety of which you are capable." O how wise is this counsel, and with what reason have all masters of the spiritual life repeated it, after the holy patriarch of cenobites! Let us faithfully put it in practice.

Let us, as far as possible, prepare ourselves for that last moment which will decide our eternity. Let us imitate the apostle St. Paul, who, writing to the Corinthians, made use of the remarkable words, *I die daily.*[1] That is to say, every day I study to die well; every day I recall to mind what should be the dispositions of a Christian when about to appear before God, and I examine whether these dispositions are mine; every day I prepare for performing, at the hour appointed by Providence, that great work, a good death; a work which I can perform but once, and on which my everlasting happiness or misery depends; every day I prepare myself for my last hour, for if my death is holy, I shall enjoy eternal felicity, while if it is not so, I shall be lost forever, although I may have employed all my life in teaching virtue to others, and exhorting them to live well, that they may die happily.

If the great apostle thus prepared himself for death, if, through fear of becoming a castaway, he chastised his body and brought it into subjection; what should not we poor sinners do, against whom the devil wages such fierce combats, and who are so faint-hearted in resisting him?

Let us establish ourselves in grace. Let us, at every cost, avoid offending God; and if we are in the state of sin, let us make haste to have recourse to the Sacra-

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 31.

ment of Penance. Would we dare sleep on the brink of a precipice, or on a declivity leading to it? Certainly not; and yet we are infinitely more rash if we live in enmity with God, for we then sleep on the brink of hell, into whose bottomless pit death may at any moment hurl us. Alas! how many have passed from their beds into the depths of this abyss of fire! Great God! what an awakening was theirs, in the midst of these everlasting flames!

"I have never remained, I have never lain down in a state in which I should not wish to die," said a great servant of God. Let us act in the same manner, and death will not surprise us. Let us remember that Jesus Christ does not say to us: "Prepare," but, *Be you also ready.*[1]

PRAYER

I know not, O my God, the time of my death; but I do know that every instant may be my last. It is necessary then that I apply myself to acquire and preserve the perfection which thou askest of me, and that I persevere, without relapse, in that state in which I ought and wish to be found when I shall appear before thee. I must, then, always be a good religious, a faithful observer of my rules, a watchful servant, who will have no cause to fear the sudden arrival of his Master.

This is the end that I propose to myself, and therefore I beg of thee, O my God, to grant me the most abundant graces, so that serving thee with fervor and

[1]Matt. xxiv. 44.

constancy, I may have the happiness to hear from thee that sentence that will begin my eternal felicity: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*[1]

Résumé, page 166.

Nothing is more certain than death; but nothing is more uncertain than the moment and the manner of our death.

1. When shall I die? I know not.
2. Where shall I die? I know not.
3. Shall I die suddenly or of a lingering illness? I know not.
4. Shall I be conscious before death, or shall I be suddenly transported before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge? I know not.
5. Shall I be in the state of grace, or in the state of mortal sin? Alas! I still know not.

—It is necessary, then:

1. To count neither on a year nor on a day.
2. To be ready to die at any hour.
3. To be constantly what I desire to be at death.
4. Never to offend God; and, if I have that misfortune, not to remain in the state of sin.
5. To make each confession, each communion, as if it were to be the last.

[1]Matt. xxv. 21, 23.

SIXTH MEDITATION

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF DEATH

Behold, I come as a thief.—Apoc. xvi. 15.

CONSIDERATION

To impress us more deeply with the necessity of always being ready to appear before him, our Divine Savior does not disdain to compare himself to a thief. Blessed is he that watches, says our Lord, for, *Behold, I come as a thief.* Now when a thief is about to enter, he does not first apprise the master of the house; on the contrary, he remains in hiding, and chooses the night, and even a dark night, for action. Thus will he do who has recommended to us to be always ready. Yes, death will surprise us as it has surprised most of those who have gone before us, and as it every day surprises a multitude of people.

Therefore it is that Jesus Christ exhorts us to vigilance and to perseverance in virtue. *Watch,* says our good Master, *because ye know not the day nor the hour.*[1] *Be you also ready; for at what hour you think not the Son of man will come.*[2] And that none might mistake as to whom this recommendation was given, he added, turning to his disciples—*And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch.*[3]

[1]Matt. xxv. 13. [2]Luke xii. 40. [3]Mark xiii. 37.

This warning which he here expresses in so direct a manner, he gives also in a number of parables. In one place he tells us of the foolish virgins who are condemned for not being ready at the coming of their Spouse; in another, of the rich man whose soul is required of him when he is calculating on using his riches and enjoying the stores heaped up in his granaries; elsewhere, of the unfaithful servant who says to himself: *My lord is long a coming; and shall begin to strike his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with drunkards: the lord of that servant shall come in a day that he expecteth not, and in an hour that he knoweth not.*[1]

Our Divine Lord, by direct teaching and by parables, reminds us of the uncertainty of death, and does so by recalling the miserable end of those living at the time of the deluge who, while thinking only of procuring pleasure for themselves, were swallowed up in the general destruction.

The Old and the New Testaments unite in establishing the truth of the unexpectedness of death, and confirm the words of our Divine Master: *Behold I come as a thief.*[2] The teachings of the saints and daily experience repeat the same lesson. *The day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night,* says St. Paul.[3] "Our Lord," says St. Gregory, "has willed that our last hour be hidden from us that we may always be in dread of it, and being unable to foresee it, may prepare for it without ceasing;" and St. Augustine speaks in a similar strain: "God has concealed from us the moment of

[1]Matt. xxiv. 48-50. [2]Apoc. xvi. 15
[3]1 Thess. v. 2.

our death, that we may every day be prepared for it."

But are not the surprises of death evident to every one who wishes to observe what takes place around him? Let us inquire of our own memory. How many people of our acquaintance have been suddenly called before the tribunal of God! Some have been struck down by death in the midst of festivity, others while at work; one at the very moment when he was felicitating himself on the enjoyment of excellent health, another when he was thinking of building up a fortune; one while amusing himself, another while asleep. All promised themselves a future which they were never to see: they thought that they could count upon their youth, their health, or their strength. Alas! was not their assurance groundless? Death heeded them not, it laughed at their folly, and it struck them, as it always strikes, pitilessly and unexpectedly.

Yes, all, the rich and the poor, the great and the lowly; those to whom youth and vigorous health seem to promise a long life, as well as those whose shattered constitutions and advanced age threaten them with approaching death, shall be struck down when they least expect it. All, then, should watch; all should be ready, if they wish to escape being taken by surprise.

Ye men absorbed in the business of the world, who think not of death, and are not ready to meet it, you will be taken away unexpectedly. Negligent Christians, like the foolish virgins, you suffer your lamps to go out; you do not think of death, you do not watch; you too will be taken away unexpectedly. Careless religious, inexact observers of your rules, faithless servants of God, whom you have chosen to be your all, you think

that the Master will not come so soon; you do not think of death, you are not ready; you also will be taken away unexpectedly. You have buried the talent which the Lord gave you for procuring his glory and the salvation of souls; you do not think of the account which you will have to render; the Father of the household will come at the moment when you least expect it; you will be taken by surprise.

"Let us always think of death," said a holy religious while walking with his brethren; "let us think of death, for we know not when it shall come," and whilst pronouncing those words he was struck with apoplexy, and died on the spot. Oh! let us understand "how happy and how prudent is he who," in the words of the author of the "Imitation," "now striveth to be in life what he would fain be found in death."[1]

APPLICATION

Could we appear with confidence before the tribunal of God if death were to strike us at this moment? Should we have nothing to atone for, nothing to expiate? Should we be ready to give an account of our words, our actions, of all our conduct? Where should we be if at this moment Jesus Christ should say to us as to the unfaithful steward of the Gospel: *Give an account of thy stewardship.*[2] Alas! what a surprise would be ours!

And yet, what has happened, what is happening every day to a great multitude of people, will one day happen to us also. Death will come when we least expect it;

[1] Bk. 1 Chap. xxiii. 4. [2] Luke xvi. 2.

our Savior himself assures us of this. Since we began to read these lines, to make these reflections, many souls have been cited before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge, and have had sentence passed upon them. We also might have been of that number.

Alas! what would be our lot if at this moment we were to grow pale, tremble and expire? We know that we may be taken by surprise; we have been assured that it shall be so; and yet we are not ready. What folly! what madness! Let us not, then, persist in a rashness that may finally lead to everlasting ruin.

One day when St. Aloysius was at recreation, he was asked: "If an angel were to announce to you that you would die immediately after this amusement, what would you do?" "I should go on with my recreation," was the answer. That was because he performed each action as if it were to be the last of his life. Do we wish to die like the saints? Let us imitate their conduct; let us keep our conscience free from sin; let us never remain in a state in which we should wish not to be found at the hour of death; let us contract the holy habit of performing each of our actions as if it were to be the last of our life.

As far as duty or charity prescribes, let us prepare our neighbor for the surprises of death. Let us do all that depends on us, that the sick may receive the last helps of religion in time and with worthy dispositions. Finally, let us earnestly beg of God for ourselves and our neighbor that we may be found watching at the hour when he shall call us to himself.

PRAYER

O my God, where should I be now, if thou hadst called me before thy tribunal on such a day, or at such an hour; if thou hadst cited me to appear before thee after that sin of which I was guilty, and the remembrance of which is still engraven on my mind? What would now be my lot?

It is not thus that thou hast acted towards so many others who, although less guilty than I have been, have not had time to repent and be converted. O my God, how great is thy mercy to me! But complete the work which thou hast begun in me, and save my soul! Grant, that watching without ceasing over myself, I may be prepared for the surprises of death, and may keep myself always ready to answer thee, when thou shalt call upon me to render an account of my life.

Résumé, page 166.

A thief gives no warning. He comes upon you unawares, he surprises you; so it is with death.

1. The wise Virgins and the foolish Virgins were sleeping, when suddenly they heard the cry: "Behold, the Spouse cometh. Arise, and go to meet him!"

2. A rich man had laid up an abundant harvest, and thought only of enjoying it. "Thou fool," he was told, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee!"

3. Men, in the days of Noe, thought of naught but pleasure, and they were suddenly overwhelmed by the deluge.

4. How many times have we not heard of sudden deaths, of unprovided deaths!

5. How many sick persons who almost in their last agony deceive themselves as to their state! Will it not be so with us?

—It is necessary, then:

1. So to live as not to be surprised by death.
2. To be always ready to render our account.
3. Never to remain in the state of sin.
4. To make often the exercise of preparation for death.
5. To do all that depends on us, in order that our sick may receive the last helps of religion in time.

SEVENTH MEDITATION

AS OUR LIFE IS, SO SHALL OUR DEATH BE

For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. —Gal. vi. 8.

CONSIDERATION

As we have lived, so shall we die. This is the general rule which we should frequently recall to mind, that it may induce us to live well, and thereby obtain the grace of dying well. It has some exceptions, it is true, but so far are they from destroying it, that they serve rather to strengthen it: for they are in reality only miracles of grace, which no one has a right to expect, and which he cannot count upon without foolish rashness and guilty presumption.

As we have lived, so shall we die. This is a law which is verified in the generality of men, and which, unless the Lord work a miracle, will be verified in each one of us. Such as we have been during life, such have we reason to think we shall be at the hour of death. Holy Scripture and reason unite in establishing this truth.

Antiochus, after having led a wicked life, is struck by the hand of God. At the sight of his misfortunes, he re-enters into himself, and prays to the Lord: but it is said in the Book of Maccabees: *He was not to*

obtain mercy.[1] *Be not deceived,* says St. Paul to the Galatians, *God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. . . . And in doing good, let us not fail; for in due time we shall reap, not failing.*[2] Now who can be assured of gathering, at the moment of death, the fruits of salvation but he who shall really have practised justice during life?

But let us listen to our Divine Master teaching us the same truth: *A good tree cannot yield bad fruit, neither can a bad tree yield good fruit.*[3] Now is not death, in very truth, the fruit of life? A bad life, then, cannot produce a good death.

To be certain of a good death we must during life apply ourselves to the faithful observance of the law of God. This is the only means taught us by our Lord. *Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils and done many wonderful works in thy name? And then will I profess unto them; I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.*[4]

He that shall persevere unto the end, in the practice of virtue, *he shall be saved.*[5] Nothing is then better established than this truth, that it is only by a holy life we can secure a good death; and even had Holy Scripture not been so explicit on this point,

[1]2 Mach. ix. 13. [2]Gal. vi. 7-9. [3]Matt. vii. 18.
[4]Matt. vii. 21-23. [5]Matt. x. 22.

reason itself would suffice to convince us of it. And, indeed, does it seem probable that he who was remiss and unfaithful in the service of God, who did not cease, if we may say so, to abuse grace, who had indulged in everything craved by his senses and passions, should be treated at the moment of death like him who had been pious, fervent and faithful in the discharge of his duties? like him who not only had abstained from what was forbidden, but had condemned himself to the most rigid penance? Evidently not. We can then easily understand how at the hour of death men should find themselves in dispositions corresponding to their conduct during life.

We must then conclude that every one determines on earth his own lot for eternity; that every one prepares a good or bad death for himself, according as he leads a good or a bad life.

We hear St. Augustine express the same truth when he says that death is the echo of life. If then, Life has said: "Piety, fervor, holiness;" Death will repeat: "Piety, fervor, holiness." But if Life has said: "Remissness, negligence, abuse of grace;" Death will repeat: "Remissness, negligence, abuse of grace."

No one, so long as he is upon this earth, can be assured of his salvation, for perseverance alone can win the crown; but since a holy life is the best preparation for death, it is true that the just man has the strongest grounds for hoping that he will be in friendship with God in his last moments; while the sinner, without a miracle of grace, can reasonably have no such hope.

APPLICATION

Let us lead a holy life: let us begin this very moment. Let us not put it off until we are seriously unwell. O how foolish that would be! What! in those moments of suffering when one is incapable of thinking of the most ordinary matters, do we suppose that we shall be able to repair the evils of a life steeped in sin, accomplish a work requiring the greatest care, and have more courage to conquer self than we had in health! Would it not show want of wisdom and prudence to count upon it? How could we prepare for death, how receive the Sacraments with fruit, when we scarcely know what we are doing, when we have hardly consciousness enough left to recognize friend or relative? How lay open a conscience filled with iniquity, when all the faculties of the soul are impaired by suffering and sickness, and racked by the terrors of those last moments? How can we suddenly detest sin, when we have perhaps loved it all our lives? Let us not deceive ourselves. Let us not forget the general rule, that we shall die as we have lived. Would we wish our death to be such as our life has been up to this moment? Would we wish to die in the state in which we now are? If it be so, let us bless Providence; if it be otherwise, let us immediately reform our conduct.

To work then, and from this very day. If we have lost sanctifying grace, let us regain it, and let us henceforth carefully guard that treasure. Let us make haste to put our affairs in order, to remedy the evil that we find in ourselves, to purify our conscience of all that

might defile us. Let us confess and expiate all the faults which might give us reason to fear that, should God call us suddenly to his tribunal, we might be condemned to eternal misery.

Let us act wisely: let us not build upon the vain hope that God may possibly work a miracle in our behalf by granting us the grace of a happy death, after we have lived a questionable, undisciplined, or even a wicked life. Let us faithfully discharge the duties of our holy state; let us keep our rules, and by constant effort to near perfection, prepare for a good death and assure our salvation.

PRAYER

Thou art full of goodness, O my sweet Jesus, and I place in thee all my confidence. Yes, I hope to die a good death, to be in a state of grace when thou wilt call me before thy tribunal. But that my confidence may not be guilty presumption, I must endeavor to live virtuously; I must constantly apply myself to do the will of thy Father who is in heaven.

I beseech thee, O my adorable Savior, deign to grant me the grace that, by living a holy life, I may obtain favorable recognition from thy mercy when my last hour shall come. This I beg of thee, O my Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, thy most holy Mother, the Queen of the predestined.

Résumé, page 167.

Death is the echo of life.

1. This the Holy Spirit teaches by St. Paul.

2. It is the general law. No one ought to count on an exception in his favor.

3. The fruit is in accordance with the nature of the tree: now, life is the tree, and death is its fruit.

4. Life is the time to sow, death the moment of reaping; but we reap what we have sowed.

5. Our death shall be good if our life has been good. It shall be bad if our life has been bad.

—Thoroughly convinced of this truth:

1. Let us assure ourselves of a holy death by a holy life.

2. Let us enter upon the right way, and never depart from it.

3. Let us henceforth reform all that is defective in us.

4. Let us lead the life prescribed by our Rules, and then we shall have nothing to dread from death.

5. Let us never cease to ask God the grace to accomplish his will during life, in order to obtain mercy at death.

EIGHTH MEDITATION

MOTIVES TO PREPARE FOR DEATH

If the tree fall to the south or to the north, . . . there shall it be.—Eccles. xi. 3.

CONSIDERATION

Nothing is of so much importance as to prepare for death. Jesus Christ has said: *Watch ye, therefore; because ye know not the day, nor the hour.*[1] The Master, then, will come at the hour when the servant does not expect him. But why these urgent and oft repeated recommendations unless the question be of supreme importance to man? Let us then understand it as the saints understood it; and like them let us think all through life of the moment that is to be our last. And in truth what an awful moment it is!

The soul on leaving the body appears in the presence of God to be judged according to its works, and in the same instant hears the sentence that decides its lot for eternity. Is the soul in the state of grace? Then a crown of glory is promised it, though perhaps it may have to pass first through the purifying flames of purgatory. But if the soul be in the state of mortal sin, even though stained by only one such sin, then it

[1]Matt. xxv. 13.

must enter upon an eternity of unutterable suffering in hell.

Yes, a saint in heaven can always say: "Because death found me in God's friendship, I possess him now, and I shall forever enjoy his presence and his love, and share in his glory and happiness." The soul that is damned shall through all eternity be forced to cry out: "Because death surprised me when at enmity with God, I now endure, without hope of relief, the most frightful suffering and the most intolerable anguish; I am devoured by a fire that shall never be extinguished."

The state in which we shall be at the hour of death is that in which we shall remain forever; and if, through the greatest of all misfortunes, we shall then be in the state of mortal sin, all, absolutely all, is lost to us for eternity. We shall no longer have the blood of a God to wash away our sins, or a Sacrament of Penance wherein to obtain forgiveness. Our frightful condition will be without relief; our evil without remedy. There is no pardon, no compassion, no merciful Savior for him who dies in mortal sin. No conversion is possible, no meritorious works can be performed, no heaven can be hoped for. For him there is no redemption, no Mother of Mercy, no guardian angel, no intercessor, no hope; nothing remains but unutterable torments in the unquenchable flames of hell.

Consequently it is of the utmost importance that we prepare for the moment that will decide our lot forever; that we arrange everything carefully and without delay for that awful journey that we may be called

upon to begin at any moment. Alas! men prepare for everything in this world except death, and yet for that no preparation could be too great. In business affairs they wish everything to be done with order and at the prescribed moment; but as to the matter of salvation they give themselves almost no concern: there, everything is left in disorder and in the most deplorable uncertainty.

Whoever wishes to acquire celebrity by the production of some master-piece begins his preparation long beforehand; he seeks counsel, he copies the best models, and devotes to the subject all the care possible. Why, then, do not all men act in the same way in what regards their salvation? Every one on earth has a master-piece to produce, one that will bring him glory for time and eternity; that master-piece is a good death. He should, then, interest himself in this, seek counsel, choose his models and copy them exactly, for these models are the saints, and above all, Jesus our Divine Master. Do not all the motives that should influence him as a rational being induce him to bestow every care upon this work and to labor for it with all possible diligence?

The scholar, the sculptor, or the painter, may try again if he has not been successful in his first attempt. At all events he risks only a fortune more or less considerable, and a reputation, which being only temporal, can be of no very great value. But it is not so with the master-piece of a good death: here only one attempt can be made; if this fails, no reparation is possible; infinite happiness has been lost forever; nay, has been exchanged for misery equal in extent and duration.

And now let us ask ourselves, who are they who are liable to fail of producing the masterpiece of a good death because of being in the state of mortal sin when cited before the tribunal of God? Both faith and common sense assure us that they are such as live in a state in which they would not wish to be found at the hour of death. And, alas! how many such are there not among Christians? They manifestly expose themselves to the danger of an unhappy death, who, having contracted evil habits, live from day to day in mortal sin; who remain in a state of tepidity that justly occasions them remorse; who, like the barren fig tree, bring forth no fruits of sanctification, though planted in good soil and frequently watered by the dew of grace.

APPLICATION

Let us not be of the number of those who foolishly expose themselves to the danger of a bad death. Let us act very differently from them; let us live as we should wish to die. Let us avoid sin. If perchance we have committed it, let us seek forgiveness by a good confession, and do penance. When our last moment has come, shall we not then wish to have avoided sin or to have done penance for it? Why are we not now in these salutary dispositions?

I die daily,[1] said St. Paul; that is to say, each day I labor to destroy some remains of the old man within me; each day I add some meritorious works to those which I have already performed, that I may be ready

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 31.

when the Lord shall announce that my last hour of time has ended, and my eternity is about to begin.

Like the great Apostle, let us die daily by thinking frequently of death, by detaching our affections from creatures, and renouncing our own inclinations. When death comes we shall wish to have made a holocaust of our body: why then not now condemn it to those mortifications at least which are suitable to our state of life? We shall wish, at the hour of death, to receive the powerful aid of the most Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and our Patron Saints; let us now devote ourselves to their honor, begging their assistance for that hour when God shall call us to himself.

In a word, why not do now what we shall then wish to have done? Well was this truth understood by that nobleman, richer far in virtue than in worldly wealth, who caused the coffin in which he was to be laid after his death to be placed in his chamber, and there lay in it every day. There he meditated upon his last end and asked himself what he should wish to have done when called to appear before God; and in this way he received from death those salutary instructions of which he believed he stood in need. Thus he merited to pass happily from this world to the next.

PRAYER

I shall die, O my God; thou hast pronounced the sentence. But I shall die only once, and my eternity depends upon the state in which I shall be found at that last moment. How frightful, O Lord, is this thought, especially to a sinner such as I! Alas! what

have I done up to this moment to make thy judgment favorable? What good works have I performed? What have I suffered for thee? What mortifications have I imposed on myself to make thee forget the sins of my life? I see nothing in me but malice and sin. Nevertheless I hope in thy mercy, O my God, and beseech thee through the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph to blot out my sins, and grant me the grace of dying in thy love.

Résumé, page 167.

Nothing is more important than to prepare for death:

1. Has not Jesus Christ said: "Be ye ready?"
2. All the saints prepared during life for the moment in which it was to end.
3. We die but once. To die a bad death would be an absolutely irreparable evil.
4. The consequences of death are everlasting.
5. A good death opens and secures heaven; a bad death casts the sinner into hell.

Let us, then, take all possible precautions to die a good death.

—For that end:

1. Let us fly from sin; let us never commit it.
2. Let us think often of death.
3. Let us have a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, the patrons of a good death.
4. At least once a month let us make a special exercise of preparation for death.
5. Let us never forget that the best preparation for death is a holy life.

NINTH MEDITATION

THE PEACE OF THE JUST WHEN DYING

The souls of the just . . . are in peace.—Wis., iii. 1-3.

CONSIDERATION

The Holy Ghost assures us that death is a gain to the true servants of God, and that they have nothing to fear from it under whatever shape it may present itself. How many times has not this saying been verified! How many people of every condition of life have with resignation, tranquillity, and even joy beheld the approach of their last hour!

Had they not every motive for this? They reposed confidently, and not without reason, on the divine mercy; grace filled their hearts, and poured into their souls its sweet and consoling unction; religion lent them its helps, which a life of piety tended to make efficacious. Eternity, it is true, met their gaze, but they saw nothing there but what they loved and eagerly desired; they knew that they were going to appear not so much before a judge as before a good and generous Master, who called them to him to give them the promised recompense; before the tenderest of fathers, the most devoted and generous of friends, who wished to make them sharers of his infinite happiness.

What a beautiful sight is that of a good religious about to finish his virtuous career! He doubtless sees in himself a number of weaknesses, of faults more or less voluntary; but he knows that these weaknesses and faults have been effaced by a sincere avowal of them to his confessor, and atoned for by a life of penance and of the strictest fidelity to the duties of his holy state.

He is tranquil, and on his countenance is the impress of that sweetness, that serenity which foretells the unalterable peace that he will soon enjoy in heaven. No bitter sigh escapes his lips; his words, though uttered with pain, express only confidence in God and submission to his holy will; his eyes, though almost closed, beam with innocence and Christian hope.

On the point of crossing the threshold that separates him from eternity, the good religious looks back without pain upon the past; he thinks of his struggles and combats; he counts his victories, not to nourish self-conceit or presumption, but rather to bless the Author of every perfect gift, and encourage himself to surrender his soul with confidence in the hands of his Creator.

He then realizes, as the pious author of the "Imitation"[1] expresses it, that the purity of a good conscience gives more joy than the most enlightened philosophy; that the consolation of one devout prayer is better than the most sumptuous banquets; that good works are better than fine words; that an austere and penitent life offers more pleasure than all the enjoyments of the world.

The sight of the minister of God who brings him

[1] Bk. I. Chap. xxiv. 6.

the last Sacraments of the Church, far from troubling him, fills him with joy; the announcement that he must soon enter another life, finds and leaves him in the greatest calm; for he has already asked those who attend him to apprise him early of the approaching dissolution of his body and the speedy deliverance of his soul.

He cries out with the holy Tobias: *O Lord, command my spirit to be received in peace; for it is better for me to die than to live!*[1] or with St. Teresa, "O my Lord, behold at last that hour for which I have so ardently longed! I now approach the moment of my deliverance. May thy will be done."

In these pious dispositions he prepares to receive for the last time on earth him who is so soon to be his eternal recompense. O with what ardor does he say, like the beloved disciple: *Come, Lord Jesus!*[2]

Faith, which served him as a beacon in his voyage across the sea of this world becomes brighter at this moment when illusions of life disperse like the last shadows of night before the first beams of the morning sun: already the brightness of heaven, dimly seen through the cloud of death, arrests his gaze. Then it is that he esteems himself blessed in having renounced the miserable enjoyments of earth, its vain and deceitful honors, after which most men run with so much eagerness, and in having abandoned its possessions which all must sooner or later forsake, and which frequently lead to injustice and anxiety during life, but to still greater solicitude on the bed of death. He esteems himself blessed in despising the things that

[1]Job iii. 6. [2]Apoc. xxii. 20.

pass away, and setting his heart on such as will never fail.

O could this worthy member of our Institute make known to us his sentiments at this last moment, what would he say to us of the state to which the Lord has called us, of the holy rules with which the good God inspired our holy Founder, and whose constant and exact observance is about to put him in possession of a happiness boundless in extent and duration! How eloquently he would speak to us of our mission among children! Perhaps some of his pupils, whom he trained to virtue, may have gone before him into the heavenly Jerusalem. Assuredly their souls will now come to meet and receive his, just as captives on being restored to liberty go forth with their families to meet their deliverer on his return to his country.

The good religious cherishes hope, and great hope, at the hour of death. He expects with confidence the wages promised by the Master of the house to his faithful laborers, and the crown of glory reserved for him who shall have fought bravely and victoriously against the enemies of salvation. With the holy King David he says from the bottom of his heart: *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?*[1] or with Blessed Bernard of Corléon: "Let us go, my soul, let us go from this life of misery to an eternity of happiness; let us go from suffering to joy, from the falsehoods of the world to the contemplation of eternal Truth."

[1] Ps. xxvi. 1.

APPLICATION

We feel a holy envy of the faithful religious who enjoys such peace of mind at his last hour, and with our whole heart we desire the same advantage for ourselves. We too may obtain it by the grace of God, as did those among our Brothers who looked with joy upon the approach of death.

Like them, let us be faithful servants of God, devoting ourselves to our labor for love of him, keeping our conscience free from deliberate fault and doing penance for the sins which we may have committed; strictly observing our rules and detaching ourselves now from all that we must abandon at the hour of death. Like them, let us excite in our hearts the most entire confidence in God, founding it on the merits of Jesus Christ and the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. In this way we shall prepare for a happy death, and to us will one day be applied the words of Holy Writ: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*[1]

St. Thomas of Aquin enjoyed on his death-bed the most profound peace. He was often heard to repeat: "Soon, yes, soon will the God of all consolation crown his mercies and satisfy all my desires; soon shall I be satiated in him, and drink of the torrent of his delights! Why do you weep?" said he to those about his bed; "death is a gain to me, and I look upon it with joy." Let us reflect that such will be our sentiments if we live a life of strict regularity.

[1]Apoc. xiv. 13.

PRAYER

O Jesus, my Savior, who didst choose to die in the most cruel anguish to merit for me the grace of breathing my last with the calm of an infant sinking into a gentle sleep, grant that I may so love and serve thee that the peace of the just may be my portion in my last moments. I beseech thee, grant me the infinitely precious grace of dying in thy holy love, repeating the consoling words: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart, my soul and my life."

Résumé, page 168.

The just, when dying, enjoy peace.

1. They indeed remember their faults; but they know that they have confessed them, and they count with reason on the divine mercy.

2. Grace abounds in their hearts, and fills them with a sweet and consoling unction.

3. Religion lavishes upon them all its aids, which have their full efficacy for them.

4. Eternity presents itself to view, but they see there only what they love, what they desire.

5. They are laborers called to receive pay for their day's work; they are children going to their father.

—Do we wish that it may be so with us?

1. Let us serve God like faithful children.

2. Let us keep our conscience free from every fault.

3. Let us fulfil well all our duties as religious.

4. Let us do penance for our sins.

5. Let us excite in our hearts the most entire confidence in God, relying upon the merits of Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph.

TENTH MEDITATION

TROUBLE OF THE LUKEWARM SOUL AT THE HOUR OF DEATH

For what shall I do when God shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?—Job xxxi. 14.

CONSIDERATION

Many saints have trembled at the thought of death. St. Paul was afraid of becoming a castaway, even after having preached to others; St. Jerome did not venture to go out of his grotto, always imagining that he was about to be called to judgment; St. Hilarion was obliged to excite his soul to confidence by recalling to mind the actions of his holy life. Now, if such were the sentiments of these privileged souls, these great servants of God, how great must be the anguish of a religious who has led a tepid and remiss life, when he finds himself upon the brink of eternity!

Let us read in his countenance what is passing in the depths of his soul. What is the meaning of those restless eyes, of that disquietude that nothing can compose, of that agitation that seizes him whenever he is spoken to about death, or is advised to receive the last sacraments? All this tells us that not only does he not experience the sweet confidence that brings such consolation to the just man on his death-bed, but that,

on the contrary, he is a prey to frightful terrors and insupportable agony of soul.

Up to this time the unfortunate man has taken pleasure in deceiving himself as to the discharge of his duties; he has perhaps treated them all as trifles or mere minutiae. But now when the truths which he has never before dared to face are exposed to view, he seems to hear the God whom he has so little loved and served, saying to him: *Give an account of thy stewardship.*[1]

Jesus Christ, his adorable Savior, whose merits and example he has despised, is now to be his judge. Heaven, which he has made no efforts to conquer, seems closed against him; and hell, which he has never earnestly labored to escape, seems yawning to receive him into its abyss. He is about to present himself before his Judge; but what plea can he offer to secure a favorable sentence? Alas! all his conduct has been but a series of negligences and imperfections, perhaps even of sins. Great God, what a state! How surrounded with terror!

Meanwhile, those who are present strive to reanimate his courage, excite his confidence, and induce him to prepare for death. "What!" he answers; "what do you speak of? Death! Is it coming so soon? Ah!" he says to himself, "how can I accept it with resignation, when I have so much reason to fear it? I promised myself a long life, and because of this deceiving hope I did not attempt to reform my conduct! And now, now they tell me that death is at hand, and that I must soon appear before thee, O my God, whom I have

[1]Luke xvi. 2.

so badly served, and so many times offended! How wilt thou receive me at thy tribunal?

"Wretch that I am, I have had so long and favorable an opportunity to put my conscience in order, and I have neglected to do so. I have so often felt thy inspiration, and yet I always rejected it; I have suffered myself to be deterred by the pretended difficulty of becoming more fervent and more regular; I have refused to give myself a little trouble to imitate the examples of virtue set me by those with whom I lived. O how foolish I have been! Why did I not put in practice the good resolutions which I had formed? Why did I not continue to live as I began when I gave myself up to God's service? What would now be my joy, my tranquillity, and my confidence! But no; I have neglected everything. I have lived in guilty indolence, in culpable lukewarmness. O my God, how deplorable is my condition! What mercy can I expect!

"Easy life!" he exclaims, in accents of profound anguish; "sensual, unmortified life which I have led at the expense of my duty! What grief and tears dost thou cost me! How different dost thou appear to me in the light of death from what thou didst seem when so seducing heretofore! Alas! while thousands of others have sanctified themselves by the same rule, doing outwardly the same duties as myself, I by my sloth and tepidity am perhaps lost forever!"

Meanwhile, his illness increases, and the time is at hand for administering the last Sacraments. Then his trouble of mind is aggravated, the remorse of his conscience horribly agitates him, and indeed it may be but too well founded; for whilst he thinks himself only in

the state of lukewarmness, he may really be in that of mortal sin. A multitude of sins crowds upon his memory; fear and the cunning of the devil so magnify them that what he once regarded as imperfections seem now to be great crimes. His conscience is a chaos which his mind cannot reduce to order, and which he has not the courage to look upon.

His last hour is now at hand. Christ's minister enters and wishes him peace. But, alas! his soul remains troubled, restless, and without consolation. O how dearly he pays now for that false peace which he wished to enjoy during life! "Alas!" he says to himself, "if the just man is scarcely saved, what will become of me, a barren tree, an unfertile soil, that have brought forth no fruits of virtue?"

God grant that he find in the helps of holy religion true peace of heart, and some of that consolation and that confidence which the fervent religious enjoys in his last hour, and which he also would experience had he passed his life in the exact observance of his holy rules!

APPLICATION

Since a lukewarm life leads to such bitterness and to consequences which may be fatal, let us carefully shun it. Let us watch over ourselves and diligently avoid every fault and imperfection. Let us discharge exactly all the duties of our calling, and correspond faithfully to grace. Let us always prepare worthily for the Sacraments, taking care to leave no unsolved doubts lurking in our conscience. Let us not wait

till God questions us; let us question ourselves. "If thou hadst a pure conscience," says the author of the "Imitation," "thou wouldst not much fear death: it were better to shun sin than to fly death."[1]

Let us not deceive ourselves; we shall have nothing at death but the actions that we have performed during life: and if now we are so blind as to neglect our duty, let us expect to experience then the most cruel anxiety. Those negligences that we call trifles when lukewarmness gets the mastery of our souls, those graces which we are continually abusing without considering their value, will rise up against us in our last hour and chill our hearts with terror. Let us have a care not to wait to put our accounts in order until the moment when we shall be cited before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge: for then it will be too late!

"Oh," said a lukewarm religious at the hour of death, "I seem to see a mountain of faults rolled up against me, and about to crush me with their weight: a thousand mouths open to reproach me with my abuse of so many graces and so many means of salvation. The voice of Jesus sounds in my ears, and tells me that he is about to cast me from his presence. Ah! wretch that I am! I could so easily have prepared myself for the hour of death, and yet I have only brought upon myself anguish, bitterness, and an apprehension that is but too well founded. Oh! you who are witnesses of my misery, do not imitate the folly of my conduct; make sure of your salvation while it is yet in your power, and beware of putting off this affair till the hour of death."

[1]Bk. I. Chap. xxiii. 1.

PRAYER

O my God, were I to look only at my past life, I might have reason to tremble for my tepidity and remissness in serving thee; but I know that thou dost threaten me only with a view to save me, and therefore, placing all my confidence in thee, I promise thee to amend my life.

O my God, I will henceforth serve thee with all the ardor and zeal of which I am capable, because I wish, at every cost, to procure a favorable sentence and to merit a place in heaven among thy faithful servants.

Résumé, page 168.

At the moment of death, the tepid soul must necessarily be troubled at the remembrance:

1. Of the many faults which it has committed.
2. Of the good works which it has neglected.
3. Of the little fruit which it has drawn from the sacraments.
4. Of the abuse of grace of which it has been guilty.
5. Of the doubt which it may have regarding its state.

—Do we wish to be in peace in our last moments? Let us live fervently:

1. Let us watch over ourselves and avoid even faults of frailty.
2. Let us fulfil our duties exactly, and above all, acquit ourselves well of our exercises of piety.
3. Let us prepare worthily for the reception of the sacraments.
4. Let us always correspond with God's graces.
5. Let us allow nothing doubtful to worry our conscience. Let us not wait till God interrogates us: let us interrogate ourselves.

ELEVENTH MEDITATION

THE FERVENT AND THE LUKEWARM RELIGIOUS AT THE HOUR OF DEATH

For the just to be in like case as the wicked, this is not beseeming thee; thou who judgest all the earth wilt not make this judgment.—Gen. xviii. 25.

CONSIDERATION

Let us consider how the fervent and the lukewarm religious differ in their dispositions at the approach of death. The fervent Christian is ready for his voyage to eternity; he has had it almost continually in his thoughts, and has prepared everything suited to render it both agreeable and consoling to him. The lukewarm Christian has given but little thought to it, having always diverted his attention from it and put off from day to day the adoption of the only means to a good death—the leading of a good life.

The fervent Christian is not troubled when told that death is at hand, for he looks upon death as the close of his exile and the gate of entrance into the Promised Land. The lukewarm Christian is terrified when told that his life is in danger; he has lived as if he were always to remain on earth, and is troubled only at the thought of leaving it.

The fervent Christian does not wait until he is advised to ask for the last aids of religion; his holy and frequent use throughout life of both confession and communion, and the great fruit which he has derived from them, make him ardently long to draw again from those inexhaustible fountains the salutary waters that spring up to eternal life. He fears nothing so much as crossing the threshold of eternity without being sustained by the bread of the strong, and he is urgent and importunate in asking those spiritual helps which his condition does not yet make imperative. The lukewarm Christian, on the other hand, waits to be advised on this point; he even thinks his attendants are too pressing, for he regards their warning as the messenger of death, of which he is in dread, and for which he feels himself unprepared. The fervent Christian confesses with his accustomed exactitude; the lukewarm Christian prepares for the sacrament as superficially at this moment as when in health, perhaps even more so.

But let us observe these opposite characters when receiving the holy viaticum. The priest, on entering the chamber of the dying man, wishes him peace: to the fervent Christian his words bring consolation, but him who is lukewarm they leave in trouble and anxiety. With what fervor does the one join in the responses to the prayers of the Church! The other seems fatigued, almost annoyed by them! "Behold," the minister of Christ says to each, "behold thy King and Savior, who, with divine goodness and charity, comes to thee to strengthen thee, and lead thee to thy heavenly country." At last, presenting the adorable Host to him, he says:

"Behold, my brother, behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world." Then, drawing near, he adds: "Receive, my brother, the viaticum of the body of Jesus Christ; may it defend thee against the attacks of the enemies of thy salvation, may it be to thee the bread of life, of eternal life."

Each receives this divine Food, but with what different effects! What relish, what sweetness, what strength the one finds in this heavenly manna, this bread of life! With what reverence he adores the Holy of holies whom he now possesses! What a consuming fire, what heavenly flames the God of love enkindles in his heart!

But as for the lukewarm Christian, what are his thoughts, what his sentiments? His previous communions were made without preparation and without the firm resolve to do well: will not the last be like the others? Will it not also be accompanied by trouble and disquietude? O how plainly he now sees the injury which he did himself by not acquiring, as he might easily have done, the dispositions necessary for receiving the sacraments with profit! Yet blessed shall he be if he now profits by this grace to repair the past, and kindle in his heart the fire of divine love! But alas! can he now will what he perhaps never efficaciously willed before?

In the meanwhile the two dying persons become weaker, and the assistants begin the prayers for the agonizing. "Depart, Christian soul," says the minister of religion, "depart from this world; go forth to meet thy God." O how consoling to the good Christian

are these admirable words! What sweetness they contain, and what confidence they impart!

"Depart, Christian soul, depart for thy eternal abode; go forth to the Father Almighty who created thee, and whom thou hast faithfully served; go forth to Jesus Christ who redeemed thee, and whom thou hast tried to imitate; go forth to the Holy Ghost whose inspirations thou hast always followed. Yes, go forth to God who is waiting to crown thee, to receive thee into his glory, and to make thee infinitely happy for all eternity."

But what effect do these words produce on the dying Christian who has led a tepid life? They sound in his ears like a thunder-clap, so attached is he to this world and to himself. "Depart, Christian soul!" Whither will this soul depart? Shall it go to the Father, whose power it has contemned, whose image in itself it has perhaps defaced? Shall it go to the Son, whose instructions and example it has always despised? Shall it go to the Holy Ghost, whose inspirations it has so long resisted? Whither, then, shall it go when it leaves this body, and what shall it answer Him who is about to demand an account of the many faults which it has committed and the many graces which it has abused?

APPLICATION

As we meditate on these truths, let us not confine ourselves to pitying the misfortune of the lukewarm soul and admiring the happiness of the fervent Christian; but let us endeavor to enter into the dispositions

of the latter, that we may have sentiments of piety and confidence like his when we too shall be at the point of death.

Let us be profoundly convinced that changes are not effected suddenly and let us reflect seriously upon this truth. Frequently, nay as a rule, men are such at death as they were during life. Although it is indeed possible to receive the sacraments worthily at the hour of death, after having neglected them during life or received them without fervor, we must take care not to presume that such will be our case; for such rashness might well draw down upon us the curse of heaven. Let us never forget that the sure means of obtaining the grace of a happy death and of completing the work of our salvation is to make all our confessions and communions as fervently as possible.

"For twenty-seven years," said a good religious, "I have made every confession and communion, as if it were to be the last of my life." Let us act in like manner, and we shall obtain the grace of receiving the last Sacraments worthily; we shall present ourselves before God at peace with him and united to his adorable Son, who will truly be our viaticum to a happy eternity.

PRAYER

O my God, what reason have I not to humble myself before thee, when I consider to what peril I have so often exposed myself by receiving the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist with negligence and coldness! Alas! in my blindness I never reflected on the fact that I was exposing myself by so guilty a habit to

the danger of dying a bad death, and of thereafter being the prey of never-ending remorse. But it shall not be so hereafter, I promise thee, O my God!

When I shall present myself at the tribunal of Penance I will think that perhaps this is the last time that I am to receive pardon of my sins, and I will make my confession as if immediately after it I were to appear before thy tribunal. When I shall have the happiness of receiving holy communion, I will prepare myself for it as if it were to be my viaticum for the great voyage to eternity.

By so acting, as with the help of thy grace, I purpose to do, I hope to receive thee worthily when thou wilt come to me for the last time upon earth. Thus through thy mercy may I be admitted after death to the abode of eternal happiness.

Résumé, page 169.

What a contrast between the fervent religious and the tepid religious, at the approach of death!

1. The fervent religious has prepared for death; the tepid has given himself little trouble about it.

2. The fervent religious is not alarmed when told that he is in danger; the tepid is quite surprised.

3. The fervent religious, feeling himself seriously ill, asks of his own accord for the sacraments; the tepid usually waits till he is reminded of them.

4. The fervent religious receives them piously; the tepid receives them as he has always received them.

5. The fervent religious occupies himself seriously with his soul; the tepid thinks almost exclusively of his body.

—Which of the two do we wish to resemble? The fervent, doubtless; but then:

1. Let us live piously.
2. Let us endeavor unceasingly to grow in fervor.
3. Let us excite in our hearts a great desire for heaven.
4. Let us love to frequent the sacraments in health, and we shall desire them when sick.
5. Let us always receive them with devotion; and we shall receive them properly on the bed of death.

TWELFTH MEDITATION

GOD THREATENS SINNERS THAT HE WILL NOT HEAR THEM AT THE HOUR OF DEATH

You shall seek me and shall not find me . . . you shall die in your sin.—John vii. 34, viii. 21.

CONSIDERATION

Of all the threats that God has made to men, none perhaps are so terrible as those which he has addressed to such sinners as put off their conversion to the hour of death. Let us but open the Holy Scripture, and we shall there find presented, in characters truly frightful, the severity of God's conduct toward the sinner who shuts his ears to the warnings of conscience, and perseveres to the end in iniquity. *"I called,"* says he, *"and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded. You have despised all my counsel, and have neglected my reprehensions. I also will laugh in your destruction,*[1] *and will give you over to a reprobate sense. Then shall they call upon me, and I will not hear; they shall rise in the morning and shall not find me."*[2] And he adds, by the mouth of the prophet Amos, *"I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the latter end thereof as a bitter day."*[3]

But the Lord is not satisfied with making these

[1]Prov. i. 24, 26. [2]Prov. i. 28. [3]Amos viii. 10.

threats, he has also added examples to show us that his words are true and that we cannot with impunity mock his warnings.

Let us recall the death of Antiochus. This impious prince, after having blasphemed the Most High, wished to go to Jerusalem to raze that city to its foundations. He was already upon his way to execute this project, when on a sudden, God struck him with a disease that caused his body to putrify. The stench arising from it drove away his most faithful attendants, and became intolerable even to himself. In this extremity the unhappy man confessed his misdeeds, and invoked the God whom he had previously insulted; but in vain. His prayer was rejected, and he died in his sins.

The New Testament also mentions an impenitent death, that of Judas. This traitor, although living in the company of Jesus, allowed the demon of avarice to enter his heart. At first his faults were, perhaps, not very grievous; but who can stop when urged on by passion? Does not the rapidity of his descent but too often hurl one over the brink of the precipice into the abyss below? So was it with this wretch. He abused numberless graces, gave no heed to the stings of conscience, despised the warnings of his good Master, and ended by infamously betraying him to the Jews. Then he hanged himself, *that he might go to his own place,*[1] as St. Peter has said.

St. Augustine gives the reason why God often refuses to pardon at the hour of death him who has despised his graces and warnings during life. "It is not the sinner who then abandons sin," says this great

[1]Acts i. 25.

servant of God; "but it is rather sin that abandons the sinner." If he does not continue to commit sin it is because he has no longer the power to do so; but his will is in reality unchanged. How many persons there are who during sickness seemed to be truly converted, but who after recovery returned to their evil habits! Do not these relapses warrant the inference that their conversion was not sincere?

Recalling the examples of final impenitence recorded in Holy Scripture, the same saint exclaims: "Of the four sinners, my brethren, whom the Holy Ghost mentions as having confessed their sins at the hour of death—namely, Cain, Antiochus, Judas, and the good thief—only one obtains mercy, and that one was washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, who was dying by his side!" Let us, then, fear and watch.

Nor is it only great sinners who are thus threatened by the Almighty. God will not acknowledge at the hour of death even those who have passed a negligent and lukewarm life in his service; who, while living in religion, have neglected to acquire and preserve fervor; who, like the sand of the desert, have remained barren, though daily receiving the dew of heaven.

To convince ourselves of this, let us listen to the words of our Lord to the foolish virgins of the Gospel. After having gone to seek oil for their lamps, they return to follow the Divine Spouse into the banquet room, but the door is closed. Then they knock, saying, *Lord, Lord, open to us;* but the Savior will not listen to them, and answers, *I know you not;*[1] that is to say: "Depart from me. In punishment for your

[1]Matt. xxv. 12.

negligence in my service you will have no share with me."

See, then, to what those who live in tepidity expose themselves; above all those who, abusing God's patience, persist in their sensual lives and criminal conduct. Having sown nothing but weeds, can they expect to gather good grain? Having planted none but barren trees, *they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and shall be filled with their own devices.*[1]

Who will not tremble after such warnings and such examples? Who will flatter himself that he will escape these menaces if he remains in sin or even in tepidity?

APPLICATION

Have not we who meditate on these terrible truths lived till now in a presumptuous security? Have we not many a time said to ourselves, "God is good. He does not wish us to be lost"? God is goodness itself, but must we therefore be wicked, and persistent in our wickedness? Must we insult his justice because his mercy is ever ready to pardon us? Let us be on our guard against falling into guilty presumption, and let us strive to assure our perseverance by repentance and fervor.

Let us turn to the Lord from this moment, and let us never more forsake him. Let us henceforth belong wholly to God. Let us live in fear of his judgments, and avoid, at every cost, whatever displeases him. Let us grieve for having so many times offended him, and let us offer him worthy satisfaction.

[1]Prov. i. 31.

St. Paul chastised his body and reduced it to subjection, *lest, perhaps,* as he said himself, *when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.*[1] And how do *we* act? What penances have *we* imposed upon ourselves? What good works have *we* performed? Alas! have we not taken great care to avoid everything that could mortify our senses, humble our minds, and thwart our inclinations?

Such was not the conduct of those Saints of the Desert of whom Palladius speaks, and who after having emaciated their bodies by their austerities, and wept over some faults of their youth for more than fifty years, still made it their prayer to God that he would show them mercy. Let us compare our conduct with theirs, and see whether we have not something more to do if we would both correspond to God's designs upon us and secure our salvation.

PRAYER

O my God, who dost utter thy menaces only that I may avoid the evils with which they threaten me, penetrate my soul with salutary fear, that I may be roused from my guilty indifference. If I have the misfortune to be now at enmity with thee, make known to me, I beseech thee, its cause, that I may at once break the bonds that fetter me. With the help of thy grace I propose to labor earnestly to satisfy thy justice and to live for thee alone.

I wish henceforth to sacrifice to thee my body with its concupiscences. I pray to thee with St. Augustine: "O Lord, cut, burn whatever in me is displeasing to

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

thee; but take pity on my soul, and receive it into the kiss of peace, when it shall appear before thee." Exercise thy justice upon me in this world, but at the moment of death receive me into the bosom of thy infinite mercy. I beg this of thee, O my God, through the intercession of Mary, the refuge of sinners and the patron of a good death.

Résumé, page 169.

We must not despair of any one; yet a bad life is usually followed by a bad death!

1. God threatens to abandon the sinner.
2. He has fulfilled this threat towards many.
3. How few examples there are of sincere conversions effected at the moment of death!
4. The Scripture mentions none, but that of the good thief.
5. Moreover, that is easy to conceive. How can any one hate on a sudden the sin which he has loved all his life!

Wherefore:

1. Let us be converted from this very moment.
2. Let us be sincerely converted.
3. Let us never more commit sin.
4. Let us beseech our Lord to receive us, in his infinite mercy, at the moment of our death.
5. Let us ask it of him through the intercession of Mary.

THIRTEENTH MEDITATION

STATE OF THE SINNER WHEN DYING

The death of the wicked is very evil.—Ps. xxxiii. 22.

CONSIDERATION

What a frightful state is that of the sinner on his death-bed, and how can we contemplate it without shuddering? If the unhappy man has lost consciousness, repentance is impossible, and, without perceiving it, he is precipitated into the abyss of everlasting fire. His soul in that state of unconsciousness is unexpectedly ushered into the presence of its Sovereign Judge, and the first words which it hears are its sentence of condemnation to endless misery.

But suppose the dying sinner has the use of his faculties, what impressions must be made upon him by his past life, his present state, and the future that awaits him! Hitherto the affairs of eternity have given him no concern. In his indifference and insensibility he heard of God, sin, death, judgment, heaven, hell, and eternity, without experiencing any emotion or feeling any sentiment capable either of arousing him or of causing him to enter into himself. But all this is now changed. The hour has come in which he must face these truths, and acknowledge that he was created not for time, but for eternity. Now it is that, at the

approach of death, his faith is awakened and he appreciates things at their true value; that the great truths of religion present themselves to his mind, and terrify him the more because of his past insensibility to them.

"I am about to die," says this man, who has been Christian only in name; "I am about to die: all is over with me; my last moment is at hand. I am about to die, and I have done nothing to prepare for death: I have observed neither the commandments of God nor those of his Church; nor have I fulfilled the duties of my state of life. Human respect has kept me in the evil way; I have been ashamed of God and his religion: with guilty eagerness have I gone after riches, honors, and pleasures. I have worked only for my body, I have done nothing for my soul."

"I am about to die," will the remiss and unfaithful religious exclaim. "I am about to die, and far from preparing for death by a good and exemplary life, I have left nothing undone to make it frightful and terrible. Alas! how have I observed my rules? What account have I made of my vows—of poverty, obedience, chastity, and perseverance in my vocation? What profit have I drawn from the Sacraments which I have so many times received? What use have I made of the many graces, inspirations, and admonitions that I have received, the good example that I have witnessed?

The sinner, enslaved by his guilty passions, thinks only of satisfying himself, forgetful alike of God who forbids sin, of paradise which he risks, and hell which he merits. But at the approach of death he comprehends his condition and the fate that awaits him; he

sees the abyss which he has prepared for himself, and the miseries which he has heaped upon his guilty head. During life he made little account of grace, of even the most efficacious graces; but at the hour of death he perceives that his guilty resistance has been as injurious to himself as it has been insulting to the goodness of God. Then he calls to mind the inspirations which he rejected, the remorse which he stifled, the Sacraments by which he failed to profit, the graces which he abused, the good inclinations which he disregarded, and the whisperings of conscience to which he would not listen; and at the sight of so many faults committed and so many graces neglected, he becomes terrified, and is plunged in an agony of despair.

On his side, the devil, who, when he wishes us to commit sin, is so skillful in hiding from us its heinousness, and in suggesting God's goodness and the facility of obtaining mercy and pardon, changes his tactics at the hour of death, and uses every effort to plunge the sinner into despair. "Your sin is too great," he says; "your iniquities are too numerous to allow of reasonable hope of pardon. Listen to them, for they already say to your soul, 'Depart from this world'; there is no longer time for preparation; you should have been ready, as he who is Truth itself had warned you."

In addition to these torments that weigh upon him, the sinner experiences the keenest anguish at quitting forever all that he loved in this world, while the terrible prospect stretches before him of an eternity of misery in that abyss of fire into which he is so soon to be precipitated.

O my God, who can picture how lamentable is his

condition, and how well calculated to chill our hearts with terror! "I believe," said a holy priest, "that the most guilty criminals would be converted had they witnessed, as I have done, the death of a hardened sinner. His cries, his despair, his rage, his contortions were truly anticipations of the torments of hell. I tremble whenever I call that picture to mind."

APPLICATION

Let us, then, be profoundly convinced that the death of the sinner is the most frightful of all calamities, the very thought of which should fill us with terror and alarm. For it is at the moment of death that Divine Justice abandons the guilty soul to the fury of the devils, and gives it over a prey to those envious spirits who will forever rejoice at its tears and sufferings. Let us, then, reflect on the misery of a bad death, and, with the grace of God, let us do all in our power to avoid it. This we can easily accomplish by making use of the means of salvation, general and particular, which our religion and our holy rules furnish us.

Let us be deeply convinced of this truth, that *the death of the wicked is very evil;*[1] and let us not hesitate to sacrifice everything rather than experience its bitter reality. Let us, therefore, fear sin and shun it at every cost. O how justly are those who commit it to be accounted their own worst enemies! What remorse they prepare for themselves! How bitterly on

[1] Ps. xxxiii. 22.

their death-bed they will deplore their foolish conduct!

Let us neglect nothing that can secure us a happy death. Let us not only be on our guard against falling into grievous faults, but let us also avoid, with the greatest care, such as are venial. Let us fear that state of tepidity into which it is so easy to fall, and which leads almost insensibly to mortal sin and subsequently to a bad death.

Let us make a holy use of the Sacraments. Let us never go to confession without sentiments of sincerity and contrition; at the same time, let us never live with a troubled and seriously disquieted conscience. Let us always prepare seriously for holy Communion, and let us make our thanksgiving well.

We shall thus draw down upon ourselves the mercy of God, and obtain the great grace of a happy death. Far from being terrified at the approach of our last agony, we shall confidently exclaim, with St. Teresa: "Behold, O Lord, the hour of my deliverance! May thy will be done. It is now time for my soul to quit its exile and find in thy presence that happiness for which it has so long sighed!"

PRAYER

O my God, what a fate would be mine for all eternity if I died at enmity with thee! I beseech thee, by the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, my Savior, and through the intercession of Mary, my good and loving Mother, preserve me from that frightful calamity. Grant, I implore thee, that I may become more faithful to thy inspirations and to the dictates of conscience,

and that I may correspond more perfectly to thy designs upon me.

I purpose, with the help of thy grace, to avoid sin, and to repent sincerely of all the faults that I have had the misfortune to commit up to this moment. I will make my confessions with all possible sincerity, that I may be able to look calmly upon death when my last hour shall come, and after making the sacrifice of my life to thy justice, may enjoy the happiness of being received into thy infinite mercy.

Résumé, page 170.

What a frightful state is that of the dying sinner!

1. If he has lost consciousness, he falls, without perceiving it, into hell, which closes upon him.

2. If he has his senses, what impression does not the remembrance of his past life make upon him!

3. What sufferings the present occasions!

4. Above all, what are his feelings as he sees eternity approaching, and he is about to appear before the supreme tribunal?

5. Unhappy man! It seems to him that the fiery abyss is already open for him! The devil perhaps keeps that thought before him, in order to make him despair.

What torments! What a state!

—Yes, the death of the wicked is very evil.

1. Let us be fully convinced of this truth.

2. Let us beg of God the grace not to experience it in our own person.

3. Let us shun sin and its occasions.

4. Let us fear it and have a horror of it.

5. Let us prepare carefully to receive the sacraments.

FOURTEENTH MEDITATION

WHO THOSE ARE THAT DIE A BAD DEATH

Neither can a bad tree yield good fruit.—Matt. vii. 18.

CONSIDERATION

A bad death generally follows a bad life: this is an important law which every Christian should bear in mind. The tree falls to the side toward which it leans. If it lean to the right, it will fall to the right; if it lean to the left, it will fall to the left. In other words, it is probable that every man will die in that state which has become habitual with him; he will die a saint, if he has lived in the state of grace; a sinner, if he has persevered in mortal sin.

To die a good death, after having led a bad life, it is necessary to return sincerely to God; but unfortunately, because the sinner has too long deferred his conversion, he seldom has then either the time or the requisite dispositions. For he must then make a good confession; and is there not reason to fear that he may be deprived at his last hour of those special graces of choice and circumstance of which he is in so much need?

Doubtless, the mercy of God is without limit, and can work miracles; but what ground has the sinner for

presuming on a miracle in his behalf? How can he who has always turned a deaf ear to the call of his Lord reasonably hope to receive another call at his last hour? Let the wicked try as they may to base their confidence on the fact that God did not create them to be lost; unless they be converted to him they will only be wresting this truth to their own destruction. They will die in their sins and will be condemned by Infinite Justice.

It is true, God did not create us to be lost. On the contrary, he wills all men to be saved; and to merit this grace for them, Jesus Christ subjected himself to countless labors and sufferings, and even to an ignominious death! But God, who created us without our consent, will not save us without our co-operation. As St. Augustine says: "He gives us grace, he furnishes us with the means necessary for our salvation; but he does not compel us, he uses no violence against our will. That is to say, he leaves those free to act who are determined to lose their souls; he does not force those to practise virtue who have no desire to do so; and such as do not wish to be converted, he does not convert in spite of themselves."

No argument, then, can disprove the principle that as man lives, so shall he die. If, therefore, we desire to die well, let us take care to live well. Let us be on our guard against a sentiment of security, which would prove fatal if there were anything in us displeasing to God.

It is not only those who profess to believe nothing and fear nothing that are in danger of dying a bad death; it is not only those public sinners who scoff at

religion and its mysteries, those scandalous apostates whose wicked example drags multitudes of souls into hell, those habitual sinners who have, as it were, made a covenant with the devil, either to cherish sin in their hearts or to call it back at the first opportunity. It is those also who, though professing a certain outward respect for religion, yet fail to practise their faith; those who, though possessing several of the moral virtues, are still bad Christians, transgressing the commandments that oppose their inclinations, refusing God the homage which they owe him, and neglecting the obligations of their state. It is those also who continue in the state of sin, who fail to profit by the Sacraments which they receive; those, above all, who profane them, and thus trample under foot the Blood of Redemption. It is those who defer their return to God, and say always: "To-morrow, to-morrow!" Alas! how much reason have they to fear that for them there will be no morrow of grace and repentance, and that they will die in their sins!

Moreover, according to all appearances, those also will die a bad death who are inconstant Christians, whose will is sometimes subject to God, sometimes to the devil; sometimes seeking the pleasures of the world, sometimes detached from them; now rising from sin, and now relapsing into evil; who seem to go to confession only to sin afterwards, and to sin that they may go to confession; who will begin too late to seek the Lord, and therefore will not find him, but will die in their sins.

To the same danger of a bad death do those remiss Christians expose themselves who, as if constantly

oppressed by drowsiness, pass their days in a deplorable spiritual lethargy, who neglect to watch over their conscience, to make their examens, to render to themselves an account of how they stand with God, and who omit their prayers. Alas! when one has been long in such a state, it rarely happens that he does not fall into mortal sin, and thus run the greatest danger of being surprised by death.

With greater reason are those lukewarm religious in danger of a bad death who take no care of their souls, who make no effort to attain perfection, who give no heed to the affair of their salvation. O how much reason they have to fear lest they be rejected by God, fall into grievous sin, and die in final impenitence!

APPLICATION

Let us see what are our dispositions. If we were at this moment to die, on which side should we fall? To judge of this, let us consider to which side we lean: our works and our conscience will tell us.

Are we not in the state of sin? Do we not neglect the duties of our holy state? Do we receive the Sacraments with benefit to our souls? Do we not check their salutary effects by our want of good will? Do we take sufficient care to keep our conscience free from every voluntary fault? Do our thoughts, our desires, our affections—in a word, does our soul incline to God or to the world? Does it incline toward the exact performance of the duties of our state, or toward remissness in this regard? Does it tend toward perfection, or, on the contrary, toward tepidity?

Let us examine ourselves with all the attention which the importance of this inquiry demands. Our lot for eternity may depend on our present dispositions; it is therefore essential for us to know what they are and to ascertain whether or not they are favorable to our salvation and sanctification.

What are our relations with God? Does he see in us faithful servants, Christians worthy of the name, fervent religious, who desire nothing more than to please him, that we may one day possess him in heaven? Or, on the contrary, does he behold in us sinners, or even lukewarm souls, characterized by indifference in his service?

Are we faithful to our obligations? Is our line of conduct strictly conformable to our holy rules? O of how great importance it is that it should be so! Our rules are for us a sure and holy guide in all our desires, thoughts, and actions. By observing them we employ the certain means of securing a happy death, and of being admitted, when we depart from this world, to enjoy supreme felicity with God in heaven.

PRAYER

O my God, who allowest me to meditate to-day on the causes of a bad death, grant that none of these may any longer exist in me. Give me a horror for sin, a spirit of piety and fervor, an affection for thy holy law, and fidelity to my rules, that I may be always pleasing in thy sight, and that, by dying in thy love, I may be admitted to reign with thee in thy glory. This is what I ask of thee through the merits of the sufferings and

death of Jesus, my adorable Savior, and through the intercession of Mary, from whose hands thou art pleased to dispense to us all favors, especially the grace of final perseverance.

Résumé, page 170.

A bad death usually follows a bad life.

Those, then, expose themselves to die a bad death:

1. Who live habitually in mortal sin.

2. Who do not practise their religion.

3. Who abuse the sacraments, or, at least, do not profit by them to amend their lives.

4. Who take no care of their conscience, leaving it like an uncultivated field.

5. Who, having embraced the religious life, fail to observe their Rules.

—Do we wish to avoid the supreme misfortune of dying in sin?

1. Let us not live in sin.

2. Let us fulfil our religious duties well.

3. Let us receive the sacraments with the requisite dispositions, that each confession and each communion may cause us to make some spiritual progress.

4. Let us cultivate a delicate conscience.

5. Let us tend effectually to perfection by the faithful observance of our holy Rules.

FIFTEENTH MEDITATION

IT IS NECESSARY TO PREPARE FOR DEATH

Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die and not live. —Isai. xxxviii. i.

CONSIDERATION

Let us make haste to put our affairs in order, for we shall soon die. Let us prepare ourselves for that moment on which our eternal happiness or misery depends. Nothing is more important, nothing is more strongly recommended to us.

Jesus Christ says: *Be you also ready.*[1] *Watch ye, therefore; because ye know not the day nor the hour.*[2] But alas! how little do men conform to this recommendation! How deplorable is their indifference to their true interests!

If a good or a bad death were a thing of small consequence; if it were only a question, in the first case, of a little more or a little less happiness, and, in the second, of a misfortune that might be repaired, of more or less suffering for a longer or shorter time, we might understand the sense of security in which men seem to live in spite of their many faults. But how can it be explained when we reflect that the evil consequences of a bad death are irreparable; that if the

[1]Matt. xxiv. 44. [2]Matt. xxv. 13.

soul is lost, all is lost; that nothing then remains but inconceivable and unending torment?

O how true are the words of our Divine Master, that the children of this world are wiser in the affairs of time than are the children of light in those of eternity! And, indeed, what precautions does not a man of the world take to conduct successfully an affair of some importance, a lawsuit, for instance, which he is anxious to gain? He chooses a skillful advocate, he goes and comes, and gives himself no rest, day or night. What will not man do to preserve his health or to be cured of a grievous distemper? He will consult a physician of great experience, he will conform with the greatest exactness to all his prescriptions, and if it be judged necessary, he will not hesitate to sacrifice a limb to save his life.

Yet what is at stake? In the one case, some money, some property that must be abandoned sooner or later; in the other, a temporal life! And to prepare ourselves for a good death, which will make us worthy of heaven, to avoid a bad death, which will entail everlasting suffering, we do nothing, we give ourselves no trouble! Is this acting like Christians? Is it even acting like reasonable beings?

If a friend had been charged to prepare a place in heaven for us, and to preserve us from hell, or, in other words, to save our soul, we should make him a thousand observations as to the precautions which he ought to take to ensure success; we should lay before him with great earnestness the necessity of employing great zeal, and the danger to which his negligence would expose us. It is a question, we should tell him, of in-

finite happiness or misery, of the enjoyment or the privation of God forever. From the depths of our heart we would cry out: "O dear friend, since you have the power, save me, I beseech you by all that you hold most dear!"

Now, each one of us is that friend, for each of us can, with the help of God's grace, save himself; each one holds his eternal destiny in his own hands. Let us, then, rouse ourselves and labor to secure our own unending happiness.

And not only our own dearest interests urge us thereto. God himself presses us to accept the forgiveness and the happiness which he offers us. What goodness! What generosity! To what can we compare it? Let us suppose that a ruler whose duty it was to pronounce sentence upon a criminal so humbled himself as to go and seek him in his prison, and address him in these words: "My dear friend, you are very guilty. I know your misdeeds, I shall be forced to condemn you. I shall have no power to prevent it, however great my desire to see you acquitted. Yet if you will adopt such and such means, take such and such a measure, I promise not only to restore you to liberty but to raise you to honor and power."

This is only a faint image of what God has done for us. What will never be witnessed before a civil tribunal takes place every instant before the tribunal of divine justice. Jesus Christ, the Supreme Judge, comes to us and says: "Poor sinners, be converted, confess your sins, repent and do penance, and not only shall I not condemn you to everlasting flames, but I will give you a place with me in paradise." If there

be any sinners who refuse such offers, who reject such advances, how cruel they are to themselves! Who can conceive their blindness and folly?

APPLICATION

Blessed, then, are they who, corresponding to the wishes of the Savior, hold themselves in readiness to appear before his tribunal; who leave nothing undone to merit a favorable sentence; who in this life satisfy his justice, that in the next they may experience only the effects of his mercy.

Let us be of that number. Let us do now what we shall wish to have done at the hour of death, when the minister of God will say to us: "Your career is ended; time for you shall be no more; go to appear before God and render an account of the talents with which you have been entrusted, the graces to which you should have corresponded, and the means of salvation which have been placed at your disposal."

Let us prepare, or rather let us always be ready, as our Divine Master warns us; let us not delay, but rather at once put our hands to the work. Let us be careful not to imitate the foolish virgins who, not being ready when the heavenly Spouse came to conduct them to the banquet, were afterward rejected by him as unknown, and cast from his presence forever.

That we may be ready, let us keep our conscience free from sin; and to that end let us frequently and carefully examine it. Let us question our hearts as to our thoughts, our actions, and our habits; as to the manner in which we discharge our obligations and fre-

quent the Sacraments, and as to the profit that we derive from these charms of grace.

Let us at times imagine ourselves at the point of death and about to appear before our Judge, who will examine all our acts, and let us see whether we can have any confidence in the works that we have accomplished, and what we can allege in our justification.

At least once a month let us make the spiritual exercise of preparation for death; let us, in thought, be present at our death-bed. In the light of our approaching dissolution let us carefully examine our conscience, then make our confession as if it were to be our last, and afterward receive holy communion as if it were our viaticum. In the evening, when we retire, let us again picture ourselves lying on our death-bed; let us imagine that we are about to receive the Sacrament of Extreme Unction; finally, let us offer to God the sacrifice of our life in union with that of Jesus dying upon the Cross. This is an extremely salutary practice, to which we cannot be too faithful.

Moreover, what we thus only picture to ourselves might prove a reality. For who will assure us that this day is not our last, that one of us shall not to-day hear the words: "Rejoice, watchful and faithful servant, thou art confirmed in sanctity and put in possession of eternal happiness?" Of if he be in the state of sin: "All is lost for thee, slothful and wicked servant, thou must be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." Let us hasten to put our conscience in order while we have time and grace to do it, for to-morrow may be too late.

PRAYER

In thy infinite goodness toward me, O merciful Jesus, thou dost warn me to be always ready, for death may strike me at any moment, even when I least expect it. Alas! O Lord, I am obliged to acknowledge in thy presence that I have profited but little by this charitable warning and invitation.

But I am resolved to do better for the future, and therefore I beg of thee to grant me both the grace of knowing my conscience well this day and the courage to do penance for my faults, to discharge faithfully all my obligations, and so to prepare myself as not to dread that terrible moment in which the book of time will be closed for me, and that of eternity be opened.

Résumé, page 171.

Let us prepare ourselves for death. Nothing in this world is so important for us as this.

1. Jesus Christ says to us: "Be ye ready."
2. The consequences of a good death are infinitely good.
3. The consequences of a bad death are infinitely evil.
4. Consider the efforts of men of the world to succeed in their affairs. But is not this the most important of all affairs?
5. God himself urges us to secure, by a sincere conversion, the grace of a good death.

—Let us, then, comprehend:

1. That it is folly and cruelty not to occupy ourselves seriously with the preparation for death.
2. That it is to give no heed to the words of Jesus Christ.

3. That this negligence exposes us to the most frightful misfortune.

4. That we must, as soon as possible, return to God by sincere penance.

5. That it is necessary from this very moment to begin a life of good works, to inspire us with confidence in its happy ending.

SIXTEENTH MEDITATION

THE DEATH OF THE JUST

But the just man, if he be prevented with death, shall be in rest.—Wisd. iv. 7.

CONSIDERATION

Let us picture to ourselves a man come from a far country, in which he has concluded a business affair of so great importance that it concerned the preservation not only of his honor, property, and health, but also of his life. He had arrived at the hour and moment most convenient to see his counsel, instruct his advocates, and justify his conduct. A day, an hour later, judgment would have been pronounced against him, and he would have been sentenced to punishment. But in place of this ignominious sentence, to which the least delay would have made him liable, he has obtained great honor and become the favorite of his sovereign.

O how sincerely he felicitates himself! How overjoyed he is! How fortunate he considers his conduct in refusing himself during his journey every amusement, every relaxation that could have delayed his arrival at so critical a time! What joy, what satisfaction he now experiences because he then made haste and took all the means necessary to prevent delay; above all, when he learns that many others with whom he had made the same journey and for a similar pur-

pose had been condemned in consequence of their delay on the way, their too great care for their own comfort, or their yielding to the wishes of certain friends who engaged them to join in parties of pleasure, and who deceived them by false promises!

How great is the joy of the seaman when he arrives safe in port, with his vessel laden with a cargo of precious merchandise! He has faced many perils, encountered many tempests, steered clear of dangerous rocks, and been pursued by enemies; but at last he has triumphed over all obstacles and come to a place of safety. The work he had undertaken is accomplished, his honor is safe, his fortune is made, everyone congratulates him, and he felicitates himself on the happy issue of his voyage.

All these instances, however, are only faint images of the happiness which the just man experiences at the hour of death. He sees, on reviewing the past, to how many dangers he has been exposed, how many times his salvation has been imperilled; he knows that many who were in the same circumstances have been lost. O how greatly he is consoled, then, in recalling the good works which he did with the help of grace! How greatly he felicitates himself on having been faithful to his obligations, on having fulfilled the will of God exactly, observed the commandments faithfully, confessed and done penance for his sins; and, if he is a religious, on having kept his vows and observed his holy rule!

In him are fulfilled the words of the royal Prophet: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*[1] And he has every reason to say, with St. Paul:

[1] Ps. cxv. 15.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.[1] Such is indeed his happiness that all the grandeur, riches, and pleasures of this world cannot be compared to it; it is even caused by his contempt for these transitory goods, which are so powerless to satisfy the heart of man.

"What would it avail me," says this faithful servant, "to have acquired distinction among men, to have made friends, received important commissions and heaped up immense riches, since now I should have been obliged to abandon everything? What would it avail me to have shared the pleasures of the world, to have conformed to its maxims, to have followed its customs? I condemn now, and shall condemn through all eternity, those things which might have caused me irreparable misfortune.

"O how I now rejoice at having followed the lessons and the example of my Savior! O how wise I have been in applying myself to gain heaven at the expense of all the possessions and enjoyments which I might have procured in this world!"

Thus he dies, not only without regret and anxiety, but even with a holy joy. He dies with a humble and lively confidence in God, and with the most assured hope of enjoying the immortality promised him. He dies in the exercise of the virtues which he has constantly practised throughout life; he dies making a generous sacrifice of his life, and enriched with the immense treasures which he has heaped up for himself in heaven.

He receives in his last moments the assistance of his Guardian Angel, who defends him against the assaults

[1]Philip. i. 21.

of the devil and, after his death, presents his soul to God. He secures the powerful and consoling protection of St. Joseph, the patron of a good death; he enjoys also that of the most Blessed Virgin, who then, in a special manner, shows herself a mother to him by interceding for him, supporting him, and filling his soul with a sweet confidence.

Jesus Christ, who is to be his Judge, comes to visit him and to be his viaticum on the way to heaven. And it is in union with his Savior that the dying man says to God, as he breathes forth his last sigh: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*[1]

APPLICATION

We all wish the happiness of the just man when dying to be ours. We all wish to close our lives in the state of grace, after being entirely cleansed of our sins. We all pray that God may receive us into his bosom at the very moment when we quit this earth. Let us, then, do all that is necessary to obtain this signal favor. Let us ask it of God by fervent prayer. Let us often hear Mass with this intention. Let us implore the assistance of Mary and Joseph for the hour of our death.

On our part, let us do all that we can to secure a happy death, and often say to ourselves, with St. Bernard: "Since I wish to die the death of the just, I must live like them, in the faithful observance of the law of God." Let us undertake nothing of importance without asking ourselves whether it will

[1]Luke xxiii. 46.

contribute to make our death holy. Let us, with St. Teresa, say every morning when we awake: "Behold a day given me to merit a happy eternity." And at every hour of the day let us repeat with the same saint: "I am one hour nearer to eternity."

Let us every month make a special exercise of preparation for death. Let us, then, meditate on the inevitable goal toward which time is hurrying us. Let us reflect on the state of our conscience, and hear Mass and communicate as if it were for the last time, offering our life to God in union with Jesus Christ dying on the cross.

It is by these salutary practices that we shall really prepare for a happy departure from this world, and merit to possess the Sovereign Good in the land of the living.

PRAYER

O my God, how good and merciful thou art to those that love thee and obey thy holy law! Thou consolest them in their sufferings, thou makest even their heaviest crosses agreeable, and at the hour of death thou fillest them with consolation and givest them a firm hope of being admitted into that heavenly kingdom for which they have longed so much. Grant me the same grace, O my God. I know that I do not deserve it; but the less I merit it, the more admirable will be thy mercy, if thou deignest to hear me, and the more thy Saints will praise it through all eternity. This favor I ask of thee, O my dear Savior, by thy own infinite merits

and through the intercession of thy most holy Mother.

Résumé, page 171.

Happy are they who die in justice!

1. They have terminated the most important, the most serious, the most difficult of all affairs.

2. They are saved from all peril.

3. Their souls are in peace and full of confidence.

4. In their last hour they are assisted by their guardian angels, by the Blessed Virgin, by Saint Joseph, and by Jesus Christ himself, who becomes their viaticum.

Full of merits for heaven, they leave the earth, saying lovingly in union with Jesus Christ: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

—Do we wish to enjoy these advantages?

1. Let us ask it of God by fervent prayer.

2. Let us occupy ourselves seriously with our salvation.

3. Let us make all concur to that end.

4. Let us faithfully keep the law of God.

5. Let us from time to time make the exercise of preparation for death.

SEVENTEENTH MEDITATION

A GOOD DEATH

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.—Ps. cxv. 15.

CONSIDERATION

A good death is a masterpiece in the production of which God and man co-operate: God beginning and completing it by his grace, which man receives and applies. A good death, being the result of God's grace and man's co-operation, is very pleasing to God, and beyond all estimation profitable to man; while it furnishes a subject of greatest joy to the saints and the angels.

A good death is pleasing to God, because it is the crowning triumph of his grace in the soul, and is the fruit of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. It is also very pleasing to God, because by it one more saint is called to heaven to glorify him for all eternity. By it an innocent soul is enabled to present to its Divine Spouse the white robe with which it was clothed on the day of baptism; one more of the elect who had been consecrated to God from his tenderest years goes to mingle with the blessed spirits who praise the goodness of the Lord throughout eternity. Or perhaps it is some wanderer from the path of virtue, who has retraced his steps and done penance for his sin; one

who had indeed soiled his garments in the filth of iniquity, but who, having washed them in the blood of the Lamb, goes to render eternal homage to his generous Redeemer. In a word, by death a well-beloved child, after an exile of longer or shorter duration, returns to his Father to testify to him the deepest love, to offer him the sincerest homage and the profoundest adoration, with the certainty of never again being separated from him.

Jesus Christ, as Savior and Redeemer, welcomes this soul as his own conquest, and presents it to his father as a trophy of his victory over sin and hell. "O my Father," he says, "thou hast given me this faithful servant, this friend of my heart; grant him the inheritance which thou hast promised him. He has been my disciple; he is my brother and thy child; through all eternity he will be the blessed object of thy affection, and it will be his happiness to celebrate forever thy ineffable perfections."

The angels and the saints rejoice that the New Jerusalem, the city of God, counts one more inhabitant. How gladly they open their ranks to receive this new citizen of heaven, whose voice will unite with theirs in celebrating the triumph of the Lamb!

The death of the saints, which thus gives so much joy to the Church triumphant, is also very beneficial to themselves, since it delivers them forever, not only from the miseries of this life, which follow one another in rapid succession, and which are a continual source of grief and anxiety, but because it frees them from the liability to sin. O how precious is death to one who looks upon it in this light! During our mor-

tal life everything makes war upon us; the devil, the world, and our own nature are leagued together to accomplish our ruin. What can be more wretched than a life of constant warfare, in which there is neither peace nor truce, and wherein one is constantly in danger of losing God's grace, and is therefore compelled unceasingly to watch over himself, and fight against his natural inclinations, if he would escape eternal ruin? On the other hand, what subject of greater happiness than a holy death, which closes this period of probation and uncertainty?

The death of the just man is a good beyond all estimation: it puts an end to many miseries, and begins a happiness that will be everlasting; it puts his soul in possession of a glory which is boundless and incomparable, which it will enjoy forever in the bosom of its God.

Hence the Scripture calls death the passage from a terrestrial mansion to a heavenly one, from an abode wanting in every comfort to one of marvellous beauty, furnished with unimaginable splendor. A good death brings with it the certainty that a happy change will be wrought on the last day, when our animal and corruptible body, which is so vile and contemptible, will be endowed with spiritual properties and clothed with resplendent beauty.

Nothing is better established than this truth, that a good death is the source of incalculable advantages. For the just man, it is the termination of a constant and cruel warfare, and the commencement of a lasting and glorious peace; it is the departure from a foreign land, or rather from a place of exile, to his own true coun-

try. It is the release of a prisoner, and his restoration to the bosom of his family, from which nothing will ever again separate him; it is the close of a miserable existence, and the beginning of a life of glorious immortality. It is a manifestation of the goodness of God, who wishes us to enjoy a happiness that will never end. It is the accomplishment of the words of Holy Scripture: *But the just shall live for evermore, and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them with the most High. Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory, and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord, for with his right hand he will cover them, and with his holy arm he will defend them.*[1]

APPLICATION

Since the advantages of a happy death are so great, should we not do all that lies in our power to secure it? "O my dear child," said his Christian mother to St. Symphorian, who was about to suffer a glorious martyrdom at Autun, "look up to heaven, and raise thy thoughts to that happy abode. To-day thou art going to exchange a life of misery for one of endless happiness. A few moments' sufferings, and heaven for all eternity will be thine."

In these terms did the saints speak of a happy death; they all looked upon it as the one thing necessary, the only good worth striving for. Let us look upon it as they did, and do all that is in our power to obtain the great grace of dying as they died.

Let us incessantly ask this favor of our Lord, by the

[1] Wisd. v. 16, 17.

merits of his passion and death. Let us entreat him to have mercy upon our soul on the last day, and not suffer it to be lost, since he created it to be saved. On our part, let us avoid everything that could expose us to the danger of a bad death. Let us avoid sin and its occasions; let us keep our conscience free from grievous faults, and, far from resisting grace, let us always correspond thereto in order to effect our sanctification.

Remembering that the most Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph are the patrons of a good death, let us have a lively and filial devotion toward them, and thus merit their assistance in our last hour and attain to everlasting happiness.

PRAYER

Since to die in thy love, O my God, is to possess thy glory and secure the ineffable happiness of enjoying thy presence for all eternity, I beg such a death of thee with all possible earnestness.

Grant me the grace of a happy death, the crowning grace merited for me by the blood of my adorable Savior. Grant me this ineffable boon, which will secure for me the happiness of possessing thee in heaven, and of there testifying my gratitude through eternity for the many favors which thou hast bestowed upon me in this life. This I ask of thee in the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior, who, to merit for us all a good death, willed to suffer and die upon the cross.

O Mary, my dear Mother, who didst die through love, obtain for me the grace of dying in the love of

Jesus Christ, thy divine Son, that with thee I may for all eternity bless him and praise his infinite mercy.

Résumé, page 172.

Nothing can supply for a good death, whereas a good death supplies for all else. A good death

1. Is the crowning work of God and man, of grace and of our co-operation with grace.
2. It is a triumph for Jesus Christ.
3. It is a source of joy to the angels and saints.
4. It marks the end of the trials and troubles of this world.
5. It is the beginning of eternal joy.

It is the entrance to port after a perilous voyage. It is a return to home after a weary exile.

—Understanding what the grace of a good death is:

1. Let us earnestly ask it of our Lord and Savior.
2. Let us avoid all that might be an obstacle thereto.
3. Let us form a good conscience.
4. Let us correspond faithfully with God's designs on us.
5. Let us be entirely devoted to the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, that they may assist us in our last hour.

EIGHTEENTH MEDITATION

THE LAST SACRAMENTS

Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church.—James v. 14.

CONSIDERATION

To understand how useful and important is the administration of the last Sacraments, let us go in spirit to the bed of a dying man who is about to receive them, and let us see what takes place there. We shall thus form an idea of what will probably occur to us at a day which, perhaps, is not so distant as we imagine.

On a table which serves as an altar are placed a crucifix, two lighted candles, some flowers or other ornaments, and different objects used in the ceremonial prescribed for the occasion. The sorrowing friends of the dying man stand around his bed and look anxious and disquieted; they seem to be in expectation of some important event. Suddenly a slight noise is heard; they listen, and distinguish the sound of a bell coming gradually nearer, then the murmur of a prayer recited alternately by a priest and his attendants. This prayer is offered in the name of the sick man, and expresses grief and repentance; or again it is offered up in the name of those who recite it, and who thereby entreat the Lord to show mercy to him whom he is about to call to himself.

Then the priest enters, holding in his hands the adorable Eucharist, which is both protected by a canopy and covered by a rich veil; for the Holy of holies, Jesus Christ himself, is coming for the last time to this child of his love, in order to prepare him to stand without fear before the tribunal of divine justice.

When he enters the apartment, the priest says: "Peace be to this house;" to which the assistants answer, "And to all who dwell therein." He then places the blessed Sacrament upon the table and kneels down to adore it. Afterward he sprinkles the sick person and the room with holy water, to chase away the unclean spirit who, in these last moments, redoubles his efforts to disturb and torment souls.

After reciting a prayer, the priest approaches the dying man, and addresses him in words of charity and encouragement, to prepare him for the Sacraments which he is about to receive, and which will further console, fortify, and sanctify him. Then taking in his hands the adorable Eucharist, which is to be the sick man's viaticum on his great journey to eternity, the priest utters these significant words: *Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world.* And he adds, speaking in the name of the sick person, to excite in his heart to a greater degree true and sincere contrition and entire confidence in his Savior's merits: *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; say but the word, and my soul shall be healed.* After having thrice repeated these beautiful words, the priest says: *Receive, brother, the Viaticum of the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. May he pre-*

serve thee from the wicked enemy and bring thee to life everlasting.

Then he begins the prayers prescribed for the giving of Extreme Unction, invoking the three Persons of the most Holy Trinity. He recommends the sick person to the Blessed Virgin and the saints who reign in heaven. Then he takes the holy oils, and while anointing the eyes of the dying man, repeats these touching words: *Through this holy unction and of his most tender mercy, may the Lord pardon thee whatsoever sins thou hast committed by sight. Amen.*

In like manner he anoints each of the other senses, offering the same prayers to God, begging him to pardon the dying man all the sins that he has committed by smell, taste, and touch, and by his feet; entreating him also to pardon all his sins of thought, word, deed, and omission. In this way he prepares him to appear with calm confidence before that God who has just given himself to him as his food, and who is soon to be his Judge.

After the administration of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, the priest calls upon the sick man to make his profession of faith, and finally asks him if he sincerely pardons all who in any way may have wronged or grieved him; and if on his part he asks pardon of all to whom he may have caused any suffering. When the patient has answered these questions, the priest exhorts him to place all his confidence in God, who will assuredly admit him to mercy and forgive him his sins, if he has confessed them with humility and repented of them from his heart.

At last the ceremony is completed. Those who have been witnesses of it look at one another with troubled countenances, without expressing their thoughts to the friend who is about to leave them. They gaze upon him with a look which seems to say: "We shall meet again in eternity."

But what at this moment occupies the mind of the sick man? What are his sentiments? What does he think of time? What does he think of eternity? What does he say to Jesus, whom he possesses in his heart, and what does Jesus answer him? O what a moment for a human being, a Christian, a religious, wherein he finds himself between life and death, between time and eternity, and in union with a God who is now his Savior and is soon to be his Judge!

APPLICATION

Let us put ourselves in the place of this dying man, to whom the last rites of the Church have been administered; and entering seriously into ourselves, let us scrutinize our thoughts and our dispositions. It is possible that at the hour of death we may not have the use of reason; but supposing the contrary, what shall we then think of the things of this world, of the creatures which we have suffered to acquire such dominion over our hearts, of those trifles which so often retard us in the way of virtue, of those gratifications which we allow our senses, and which are so hurtful to our spiritual life? What shall we then think of the dispositions with which we make our confessions and communions? What shall we wish to have avoided?

What shall we wish to have done? Let us for the future act as we shall then wish to have acted.

Let us observe the precepts of the Gospel, avoid sin with the greatest care, do penance for the sins which we have committed, keep ourselves in God's grace, mortify, subdue, and sacrifice our appetites. In a word, let us live as true religious. Let us make each confession as if it were to be our last; let us from time to time communicate as if receiving viaticum and about to appear before him who gives himself to us.

By this constant watchfulness and by these pious practices we shall prepare to receive the last Sacraments worthily, to derive abundant fruit from them, and secure for ourselves the inestimable grace of a holy death.

PRAYER

Behold me prostrate at thy feet, O my God, to beg of thee the grace of receiving the last Sacraments with holy dispositions. Grant that the anointing of my senses may purify them, sanctify them, and render me worthy to be admitted at the very moment of death among the number of thy elect.

O my adorable Savior, I entreat thee by all thou didst suffer for my salvation, grant me the grace of sincerely bewailing my sins and of doing condign penance for them, that when for the last time thy minister shall give me thy adorable Body and Blood, I may receive thee worthily and thus be prepared to appear before thee. This I beg of thee, by thy infinite merits

and through the intercession of Mary, my loving Mother.

Résumé, page 172.

Let us consider what takes place when the last sacraments are administered.

1. All is prepared in the sick person's room.
2. The priest, carrying the holy Viaticum, comes to him, accompanied by some pious persons.
3. He blesses him and speaks to him feelingly.
4. He gives him the holy Communion as viaticum for the journey to eternity.
5. He anoints each of his sense-organs with the holy chrism.

What ought the thoughts of the sick person to be? —What shall ours be?

1. What shall we then think of the things of this world?
2. What shall we think of the frivolities which so often stopped us in the practice of virtue?
3. What shall we think of the gratification we may have given to our senses?
4. What shall we think of the sacraments that we have received during life?
5. What shall we think of the state of our conscience?

Let us think of this now, and hasten to reform our conduct.

NINETEENTH MEDITATION

RECOMMENDATION OF THE SOUL

Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world.—Prayer of the Church.

CONSIDERATION

Let us go in spirit to the bedside of a dying man, and let us assist with religious recollection at this important event which is to decide the eternal lot of an immortal soul. Let us listen to the minister of the Church, or, in his absence, to some pious person, who, after invoking the adorable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as well as the Saints who enjoy eternal felicity, beseeches Jesus Christ, by the merits of his death, resurrection, and ascension, to have pity on him who is in his agony, and show him mercy.

Turning to the dying man, the priest addresses him in these touching words: "Go forth from this world, O Christian soul, purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, sanctified by the waters of baptism and nourished by the adorable body of thy Savior. Go forth in the name of the Father who created thee to his own image, to make thee eternally happy in heaven. Go forth in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who for thy sake suffered a painful death, and who like a tender friend waits upon thee, rather to

recompense than to judge thee. Go forth in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee by the abundance of his blessings and graces.

"We pray, O Christian soul, that when thou leavest the body which has served thee as an instrument in the practice of virtue and the advancement of the glory of God, thou mayst be received into the heavenly Jerusalem; that the enemies of thy salvation may be scattered, and may have no power to attack thee who hast been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ; that our divine Savior who has deigned to die for thee may receive thee into the mansions of his glory; that the Good Shepherd, who never suffers any sheep to be lost that sincerely wish to belong to him, may say to thee as he did to the good thief, *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*[1]

At last, addressing himself directly to God, the priest says: "O merciful God, O gracious God, O God, who, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blottest out the sins of the penitent, and graciously remittest the guilt of past offences; look favorably upon this thy servant, and in thy mercy hear him as he craves, with heartfelt confession, the remission of all his sins. Renew within him, O most loving Father, whatsoever hath been corrupted through human frailty, or violated through the deceit of the devil. . . . Have pity, Lord, on his groanings; have pity on his tears; and admit him, who hath no hope save in thy mercy, to the Sacrament of thy reconciliation."

Then turning to the dying man, the priest says: "I commend thee to Almighty God, dearly beloved brother, and commit thee to him whose creature thou art; that

[1]Luke xxiii. 43.

when thou shalt have paid the debt of humanity passing through death, thou mayest return to thy Maker, who formed thee from the dust of the earth. When, therefore, thy soul goeth forth from thy body, may the glorious company of Angels meet thee; may the council of the Apostles who shall judge the world greet thee; may the triumphant army of white-robed Martyrs come out to welcome thee; may the band of shining Confessors, crowned with lilies, encircle thee; may the choir of joyous Virgins receive thee; and unto the bosom of blessed rest may the embrace of the Patriarchs clasp thee; gentle and joyful may the face of Jesus Christ appear to thee, and may he award thee a place among those who stand before him forever."[1]

The priest begs God to succor the soul of his servant, and deliver it from all danger, as he delivered Henoch and Elias from death, Noe from the Deluge, Abraham from the land of the Chaldeans, Job from his sufferings, Isaac from the hands of his father, Lot from the destruction of Sodom, Moses from Pharaoh, Daniel from the lions' den, Susannah from her accusers, and St. Peter and St. Paul from their chains. Then the witnesses of the last moments of the dying man add: "Acknowledge, O Lord, thy creature, made not by strange gods, but by thee, the only living and true God; for there is no other God beside thee, and none that doeth according to thy works. Make glad his soul, O Lord, with thy presence, and remember not his old sins, and the excesses which wrath or heat of evil desire may have aroused. For though he has sinned, he has not denied the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; but has believed, and has had zeal for God, and has

[1]Version of Baltimore *Manual of Prayers.*

faithfully worshipped God, the Creator of all things.

"Remember not, O Lord, we beseech thee, the sins of his youth, nor his ignorance; but, according to thy great mercy, be mindful of him in the brightness of thy glory."[1]

APPLICATION

What will be our sentiments when, attacked by some mortal sickness, we shall see some of our community, with sorrowful countenance gather around our bed, present the crucifix to us to kiss, offer us holy water, and beg us to unite with them in mind and heart, and in the prayers which they are about to offer to heaven in our behalf? What shall we then think of the world, its riches and pleasures, when told that we must soon quit all forever? What shall we think of that which is now perhaps the only object of our desires, although we are fully aware of the vanity of everything that is not God, or worthy of God? How shall we then wish to have practised the virtues of our state, and to have fulfilled the duties of our profession? Shall we not wish to have acted with greater perfection, with more faith, more devotedness, more earnestness than we now manifest?

Let us seriously and honestly examine ourselves, and judge whether our soul will hear with pleasure the invitation to depart from this world; whether, when those round our bed speak to us of God the Father, who created us, God the Son, who redeemed us, and God the Holy Ghost, who sanctified us, we shall be able to give

[1] Baltimore Manual.

testimony that we have done the will of the Father, profited by the merits of the Son, and followed the inspirations of the Holy Ghost; whether the prayers, which, during life, we shall have offered to Mary, will have been such as to assure us at this terrible moment the protection of our loving Mother.

Since it will be so consoling in our last moments to have practised virtue during life, let us now make this our principal, or rather, our only study. Let us detach our hearts from everything in this world, and let us cherish no affection but for the things of heaven. Let us live as we should then wish to have lived, that is to say, with fervor and regularity. Let us earnestly recommend our departure from this world to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, and let us with this intention, frequently address our prayers to them. Let us labor seriously to correct our faults; let us never forget that, being religious, we should unceasingly aim at perfection. Let us frequently, in imagination, place ourselves face to face with death, and ask ourselves whether we are ready to die.

Happy they who thus act! They experience only peace and joy when the minister of God, standing beside their dying bed, says: "Depart from this world, Christian soul; go to Jesus Christ who awaits thee."

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, I implore thy clemency by thy Passion and Death. O grant, I beseech thee, that, corresponding to the graces which thou dost unceasingly lavish upon me, I may be able to say with thee, *Father,*

into thy hands I commend my spirit.[1] O adorable Savior, by all thou didst endure for me, I beg of thee not to abandon me in that moment when I shall end my exile. I implore thee in thy mercy, in the name of Mary, my tender Mother, in the name of thy angels and saints, take pity on my soul; and when at last it shall appear before thee, deign to receive it with favor and to admit it into heaven, there to celebrate forever thy boundless mercy.

Résumé, page 173.

Let us assist, in spirit, at the recitation of the prayers for the recommendation of the departing soul.

1. The priest, or the pious person who presides, invokes the Blessed Trinity and all the saints.

2. He implores Jesus to have pity upon the sick person.

3. To the latter he addresses the words: "Depart from this world, Christian soul."

4. He implores God to look upon him with compassion.

5. The faithful present unite with him in imploring the same grace.

Let us consider that one day it shall be so with us.

—Do we wish to hear with joy these words: "Depart from this world, Christian soul"?

1. Let us detach ourselves from everything here below.

2. Let us live in fervor and regularity.

3. Let us recommend our last moments to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph.

4. Let us labor to correct our faults.

5. Let us often, in thought, place ourselves face to face with death, and ask ourselves if we are ready to die.

[1] Luke xxiii. 46.

TWENTIETH MEDITATION

THE HOLY LONGING FOR DEATH

Wo is me, that my sojourning is prolonged!—Ps. cxix. 5.

Wo is me, that my sojourning is prolonged![1] cried out the royal Prophet. *I desire,* said St. Paul, *to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.*[2] Such are also the longings of every soul inflamed with the desire of seeing and possessing its God. This desire produces in it a holy languor at seeing itself still separated from him who is the sole object of its affections, and a pleasing emotion that impels it to its Beloved, whom it always looks upon as its Sovereign Good and Last End, and to whom it wishes to be united forever.

How many saints have felt this salutary desire of death! How often have they said, with the great Apostle: *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*[3] It was not really weariness, nor yet disgust of this life of misery that gave rise to such sentiments; but rather an ardent love for God, from whom they could not without the bitterest grief endure to be separated.

Such should be the desire of all who know what earth is and who believe in heaven. Is it not natural for a traveller to long for the end of his journey, for a prisoner to look forward to his release from captivity, for

[1]Ps. cxix. 5. [2]Philip. i. 23. [3]Philip. i. 21.

an exile to sigh for his native country, for a child to be impatient to see again a good father and a loving mother from whom it has long been separated?

Can a soul that knows and loves God, and knows also that it can find happiness only in possessing him, help longing for death as the only means by which it can secure this possession? Can a soul that reflects on the miseries of this life, and its own momentary danger of being lost, be other than anxious to be delivered from them, and see its salvation placed beyond peril? Can a soul that knows its liability to commit new faults avoid crying out, with St. Paul: *Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*[1] Can it help feeling an ardent and vehement desire to be admitted into the heavenly Jerusalem?

O how many motives has not the Christian to look upon death with complacency! Indeed, how can he love a world in which he is forced to witness so many insults offered to God, his adorable Savior? Can a child feel happy in a country where outrages, in word and deed, are constantly committed against a father whom it tenderly loves? How then, can the Christian love a life which only prolongs his exile? Is he not in this world, like the Jews in the land of captivity, who cried out: *How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land?*[2] *Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept when we remembered Sion.*[3] It is indeed true that a soul penetrated with lively faith finds little pleasure on this earth, and that death is consoling to him who longs to possess what *eye hath not seen, nor*

[1]Rom. vii. 24. [2]Ps. cxxxvi. 4. [3]Ps. cxxvi. 1.

ear hath heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.[1]

Death is, indeed, desirable to him who looks upon God as his Father; who knows the happiness of being inseparably united to him. Therefore, does the fervent Christian often exclaim with the pious author of the "Imitation:" "O most happy mansion of the supernal city! O most bright day of eternity, which no night ever obscureth, but which the Sovereign Truth always enlighteneth? Day always joyful, always secure, and never changing its state for the contrary! O that this day would shine forth, and that all these temporal things would come to an end!

"It shineth indeed, upon the Saints, resplendent with everlasting brightness; but to us pilgrims upon earth it is seen only as afar off and through a glass. The citizens of heaven know how joyful that day is; but we poor exiled children of Eve mourn that this, our day, is bitter and tedious.

"The days of this life are short and evil, full of griefs and distresses. . . . Oh! when will there be an end of these evils? When shall I be set at liberty from the wretched slavery of vice? . . . When, O Lord, shall I think of thee alone? When shall I fully rejoice in thee? When shall I be without any impediment in true liberty, without any grievance of mind or body? . . . O good Jesus, when shall I stand to behold thee? When shall I contemplate the glory of thy kingdom? When wilt thou be all in all to me? When shall I be with thee in thy kingdom, which thou hast prepared for thy beloved from all eternity."[2]

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [2] Bk. III. Chap. xlviii.

APPLICATION

Of what use is it to live long, says the author of the "Imitation," when we advance so little? A long life does not always amend us; nay, oftentimes it doth rather augment our guilt.[1] Why, then, do we so long for it? Assuredly, it would be far better to live the life of the saints for a few years, than to attain extreme old age and live neglectful of what concerns our salvation and perfection.

At every hour of the day St. Teresa was accustomed to inflame her heart with a greater desire for heaven, by saying to herself, "Courage, my soul, behold we are one hour nearer eternity!" Thus, also, should we often address ourselves, and thereby both detach our hearts from earth, and excite ourselves to labor more earnestly for our sanctification.

In the afflictions and trials of life, let us reflect that we are drawing near the term of our deliverance and that we shall soon enter into glory. This thought will prove a great consolation to us, for death is, indeed, a gain to him who has lived holily. Like King David, he rejoices at the thought that he will soon go into the house of his Lord, and with St. Ignatius he exclaims: "O how contemptible earth appears, when I look up to heaven!"

If we have lively faith and firm confidence, if our life has been holy, we shall entertain the same sentiments. We shall envy the lot of those who die in the Lord, and to secure this inestimable advantage to ourselves we will, like them, become detached from the

[1] Bk. I. Chap. xxiii.

things of earth, and seek only *the kingdom of God and his justice.*[1] Like them, we shall despise all that passes with time, and love only what lasts for eternity. Like them, we will say to our Savior, "Come, adorable Jesus, come and take possession of a soul that belongs to thee by so many titles, a soul that loves thee and fears a long life, because while it remains united to the body it is, alas! capable of offending thee. O Divine Master, to those who love thee, how burdensome it is to live in this world always exposed to the danger of losing thy grace, and oppressed with the weight of their own depraved appetites!

PRAYER

O Jesus, my adorable Savior, my soul languishes with desire to see thee and be united to thee forever. I beg of thee, then, to put an end to its sufferings, and deliver it from this land of exile, where, far removed from thee, it sighs continually for thy presence.

Wilt thou delay long, my dear Jesus? My heart forever sighs after thee, for what can I love on earth, or desire in heaven, but thee, O my God, the Beloved of my soul? Grant that I may soon depart from this world to behold thee in heaven, for thou art the Supreme Beauty, who alone canst give me perfect happiness. Break, O Lord, the bonds that still unite me to earth; destroy this house of clay that holds my soul captive, and deign to put me in possession of thy eternal inheritance.

[1] Matt. vi. 33.

Résumé, page 173.

The words of the royal prophet express a feeling common to all the servants of God. All desired to die, in order to possess God.

1. They understood what our miseries are here below.

2. They considered themselves as exiles, as prisoners.

3. In their eyes death was only a liberator whose coming they ardently desired.

4. Faith showed them the blessings to be enjoyed hereafter.

5. Their hearts were already in heaven; why should they not be impatient to go and dwell there?

—Like the saints:

1. Let us detach ourselves from life.

2. Let us realize its many miseries.

3. Let us not dread its end.

4. Confiding in Jesus Christ, let us accept death with resignation, if not with joy.

5. Let us excite in our hearts the most ardent desire of heaven, saying, with the Apostle: "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."

TWENTY-FIRST MEDITATION

STATE OF THE BODY AFTER DEATH

Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.—Gen. iii. 19.

CONSIDERATION

Let us go, in imagination, to the chamber of a man who has just expired, and gaze upon his corpse, stretched motionless upon the bed. He has scarcely breathed his last sigh, and yet a sad change is already taking place. His head droops, and is inclined to one side; his hair is dishevelled, and still bathed in the sweat of his agony; his eyes are sunken, his cheeks wasted, his lips livid; his countenance, at first colorless, gradually assumes a greenish hue, that announces the beginning of decomposition. All present shudder on beholding him; none can look on him with a tranquil, unaltered countenance.

But this is only the first outline of a picture that hourly becomes more frightful and revolting. A few hours have scarcely gone by when the stench from his body becomes insupportable. To preserve the house from infection, and to save the inmates from fatal consequences, it is necessary to air the rooms, to open the doors and windows, to burn perfumes, and adopt

a thousand precautions. At last, even the friends of the dead man make haste to get rid of an object which is not less dangerous than it is hideous and revolting.

Already notice of his death has been registered. The coffin is brought, and the funeral bells ring to announce that this man, however great, rich, or learned, must depart from his home, never to re-enter it; and that after a short interval passed at the foot of the altar, his only habitation will be the ground. Soon the procession arrives at the place of burial. The grave, sanctified by the blessing of the Church, receives the victim of death, and encloses him within its bosom. After some prayers and a few expressions of regret, more or less sincere, each of those present bids adieu to the deceased and retires; all is now over for him in this world.

But to give us a more perfect idea of the fate of the body after death, let us visit the corpse some days after it has been laid in the earth. Let us remove the clay that covers it, and gaze upon the sight before us. The body is livid, but it soon turns black, and is covered with a sort of white froth. From this issues a glutinous matter which is absorbed by the wood, then filters into the ground, and there becomes the food of a multitude of worms. The cheeks are decomposing; the flesh is falling away, and disclosing the bones; the arms and legs are becoming detached from their sockets, and falling to pieces. Last of all, there remains only a hideous and fragmentary skeleton, which is soon decomposed, becoming in the language of Bossuet, "a something, I know not what, a thing that has no name in any language." O God, to what a condition is the

votary of pleasure reduced who gave everything to his body and refused everything to his soul? Behold that body now, a mass of filth and corruption, an object of horror to the living.

Behold the remains of the sensualist who, to gratify his body, stained his soul with a thousand crimes; or of the man of good cheer, who sat down every day to a table loaded with exquisite viands, while he refused to succor the needy, leaving them, so to say, to die of hunger under his very eyes. Behold now the body of the vain man who, giving no thought to the nakedness of his soul, busied himself only with adorning a victim that death was soon to immolate; or that of the proud man who could endure no humiliation, however trivial, without bursting into a rage. See the present state of the body of that ambitious man, who thought only of exalting himself in the world; often even at the expense of justice and honor. See the condition of the avaricious man's body, who made an idol of his fortune, and refused his superabundance to the poor of Jesus Christ. A few boards that enclose his remains, the worms that devour his flesh, the curses that perhaps cling to his memory, are all that is left of him and his treasures.

Behold the fate that awaits the body of every man—dust and worms! The just man as well as the sinner must submit to this; but when viewed from the standpoint of faith, how different is the destiny of each! The body of the saint decomposes and crumbles into dust; but even in that state it is a precious object, a relic worthy of respect and honor, a deposit which is entrusted for a time indeed to the earth, but which the

angels respect and God himself looks upon with complacency.

The body of the reprobate, on the other hand, is to the eyes of faith, still more than to those of nature, an object of unspeakable horror. God and his angels look upon it as the remains of one that is condemned to hell, a victim that is destined to eternal flames, an object of anger and malediction, a creature that has been so perverted from its end as to become an instrument of sin. This body that was flattered, pampered, and idolized upon earth, is destined to be one day the habitation of the wicked soul that used it for guilty purposes, and is then to be cast into that furnace of inextinguishable fire, kindled by divine anger! Yes, a day of resurrection will come, and then the soul of the sinner, even more hideous than his body into which it will enter as into a fearful prison, will henceforth suffer with it that miserable eternity which it had already begun to experience alone.

APPLICATION

There will, then, come a day, and that day is not far distant, when I also shall die. My body, forsaken by my soul, shall lie motionless; my eyes shall see no more; my ears shall hear no more; my hands shall work no more; my tongue shall speak no more; my feet shall no longer bear me from place to place. Soon afterward, my corpse shall undergo a frightful transformation; my countenance shall become an object of horror; an insupportable exhalation shall drive away my friends and kindred, and lastly, my limbs shall crumble, and become the food of worms. Oh! shall I then wish to have

idolized this body? to have taken so much care of it? to have made myself its slave, and sacrificed my soul for it?

"Ah!" said a great saint while meditating among the tombstones, "if God permitted the dead to tell me what they now think of the pleasures and riches of the world, what they think of mortification and penance, of humble, sincere and contrite confession, how profitable would their lessons be, how eloquent their language!"

But do not faith and reason tell us enough on all these subjects? Let us listen to them, and we shall force ourselves to practise virtue, which alone can constitute our happiness. No doubt, the body will complain of a penitential life, but let it complain. We can address it as St. Francis did his, while loading it with austerities: "Courage, my body, we shall go together to Paradise."

PRAYER

Worms and dust! Behold, O God, the fate of my body, which has so frequently been an instrument of my soul in its rebellion against thy holy law. I confess that it deserves to be humbled and reduced to the dust whence it was formed, but I entreat thee to remember, O Lord, that it is the work of thy hands; that by baptism it was consecrated to thee; that often, O my Divine Redeemer, it was the living tabernacle of thy body and blood; and that it is destined to rise again in glory. Grant, O my Jesus, that after having been subjected to the penalty imposed upon all men, after having remained in the dust of the tomb till the

day of judgment, it may rise again glorious, and go with my soul in triumph, to enjoy the repose which thou hast merited for thy elect.

Résumé, page 174.

To what a state is the body of man reduced after death!

1. At the moment of his last sigh it is already frightful to behold. We cannot without shuddering consider his discolored cheeks, his sunken eyes, his livid lips.

2. Some hours later it begins to decompose and to spread infection far and wide.

3. It is hidden from the sight, it is placed in a coffin.

4. It is then carried to the grave, where the work of death is finished.

5. Consider the horrors of the tomb! The flesh is soon devoured by worms, and only a hideous skeleton remains.

—Let us then comprehend:

1. That it is folly to take so much care of what must soon perish.

2. That they are wise who sacrifice the body to save the soul.

3. That all is vanity, except to love and serve God.

4. That it is necessary to practise penance.

5. That we should now detach ourselves from all things, since death is to deprive us of all.

TWENTY-SECOND MEDITATION

STATE OF A SOUL THAT AWAITS JUDGMENT

For what shall I do when God shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?—Job xxxi. 14.

CONSIDERATION

Let us picture to ourselves a man accused of some crime, shut up in a narrow cell, whilst human justice is preparing for his trial. What are his thoughts, his fears, his anxieties, while awaiting the day that must decide his fate? At last that day comes, the unhappy man hears the bolts of his prison door shot back; the door opens, attendants seize him and hurry him off to the place of trial.

O what a sight there meets his eyes! He beholds the judge seated on his tribunal; the prosecutor holds the indictment in his hand; the jury are called to pronounce upon the guilt of the prisoner; the witnesses are there too, ready to disclose everything that can make him appear guilty. At this sight he shudders and trembles; he has to be led, perhaps even to be carried to the dock, where he is exposed to the gaze of thousands of spectators, many of whom seem to demand a speedy verdict of guilty.

But this is not all; the witnesses are questioned, the

charges of the indictment are read in his hearing; everything gives him reason to fear a severe sentence. At last the trial is ended; the judges retire, and the jury deliberate. After a time the jury return, bringing in a verdict of guilty; the judge administers the law, and the greatest silence prevails throughout the assembly while the sentence is pronounced.

O what feelings then surge in the soul of the culprit! What fear! What agony! A pallor overspreads his countenance, his heart beats fast, his body trembles convulsively, betraying the agitation of his mind; he is half dead with fear and shame. Great God! what a situation!

And yet this wretchedness is but a feeble image of what the sinner experiences whose soul is about to appear before its Sovereign Judge. Already he seems to see his Judge seated upon his tribunal, accompanied by multitudes of angels, the faithful ministers of his vengeance. He seems to see the devils ready to accuse him, and with them are associated all those whom he has drawn into sin. His own conscience is his most formidable accuser. He thinks of his angel guardian, but he fears that this heavenly spirit, whose inspirations he has so often rejected, has nothing to plead in his behalf.

He knows that for him it is a question not merely of guilt, or of transitory punishment, which at the most will extend over a life-time; but of a sentence that will last for eternity, of a sentence that will determine his endless happiness or misery; and therefore he is unspeakably more anxious than the criminal about to be condemned by an earthly judge. The latter may

find consolation in the thought that it is in his power to appeal to another tribunal or that he may possibly obtain pardon, but at the tribunal of God there is no such possibility. From the sentence there passed there is no appeal; nor is there the slightest hope that the condemnation there uttered will ever be reversed.

It is generally thought that the tremblings and convulsions of the agonizing are merely the effects of physical suffering; but may it not be that they also arise from apprehension of the judgments of God? Who can tell the sentiments of a soul when it realizes that it must almost immediately be launched into eternity? when it says to itself, "I must soon appear before the Sovereign Judge to render an account of my actions. What is the state of my conscience? Am I in the state of grace? Alas! I am compelled to acknowledge that I am stained with many sins. Moreover, does not everything rise up against me to accuse me before thee, my Sovereign Master? Who will plead my cause at thy terrible tribunal? Soon I shall hear the sentence that will fix my doom for eternity, and I know not that the sentence will not be one of condemnation."

In such considerations there is enough to chill the blood of whoever reflects upon them, as did St. Jerome. In spite of his penitential life, this saint was penetrated with the fear of judgment. "I shudder, O Lord," said he, "when I call to mind that open book in which my sentence is written in indelible characters; when I think of that balance which thou holdest in thy hand, one side of which contains my sins, alas, far too numerous, and the other, my few and imperfect virtues. Thy arm, O Lord, is about to raise the balance, and according to

whichsoever side it will incline, wilt thou pronounce the sentence of eternal happiness or eternal woe."

APPLICATION

Like this great saint, let us dread the judgment which we must undergo, and let us do all that we can to make it favorable. Let us interest our Judge himself in our behalf. Let us be faithful servants of Jesus Christ, filled with zeal for his glory, living only to accomplish his will, and devoting ourselves to him in the person of our Brothers and our pupils; for assuredly we shall then find favor in his eyes on the great day of justice.

Let us anticipate our accusers by now accusing ourselves with the necessary dispositions at the tribunal of penance of whatever we have done amiss in the past; and by avoiding sin with the utmost care for the future. Let us resist the devil, and make no other than a holy use of earthly things; and neither they, nor the devil, shall rise in judgment against us.

Let us settle our conscience, for it is chiefly by its testimony that we shall be justified or condemned. Does it reproach us with some fault? Let us hasten to satisfy it whilst we are still in this life, lest hereafter it deliver us up to the Sovereign Judge. This is what Christ himself warns us to do, so anxious is he to bless us on that last day.

According to the recommendation of the apostle, let us judge ourselves and we shall not be judged. Prostrate in spirit before this terrible tribunal, and under the eyes of this all-seeing, inflexible Judge, let us search

the innermost recesses of our hearts; let us weigh in the scales of divine justice all our thoughts, desires, and actions. Let us examine ourselves with salutary severity, putting far away all self love and whatever else might blind us to our true condition. Let us acknowledge and condemn our faults, and do worthy penance for them. By fidelity to these practices, we shall avoid the sentence of reprobation, and merit an everlasting blessing.

PRAYER

I will devote myself, O my God, to prepare for thy sentence of judgment. Spirits of darkness and my own cowardice have hitherto often misled me, making abortive all my resolutions of amendment, formed at the thought of thy justice. I will no more say: "To-morrow, to-morrow," but, "This very instant." From this moment I will begin seriously to prepare for this judgment. From this moment I will judge myself with all severity; then may I hope that thou wilt judge me favorably.

But, O Lord, thou knowest how disposed I am to deceive myself and conceal my faults from myself. Enlighten me, then, I beseech thee with thy divine light; and teach me to know myself as thou knowest me. Grant that after having discovered all within me that is deserving of condemnation, I may burst asunder the chains that bind me, so that I may look forward with filial confidence to the hour when thou wilt summon me before thy supreme tribunal.

Résumé, page 174.

The anxiety of a person accused, when about to appear before a tribunal is nothing in comparison to that of a soul when presenting itself before the Sovereign Judge.

Let us consider it as it asks itself:

1. Before whom am I to appear?

2. In what state is my conscience? Am I free from sin? Am I guilty?

3. What will my accusers testify against me?

4. What will my advocates say for me? Will my guardian angel plead my cause?

5. What sentence will be pronounced upon me?

—Do we wish to avoid anxiety?

1. Let us by our works render our Judge favorable.

2. Let us avoid sin, and thus disarm our accusers.

3. Let us satisfy our conscience, for it is upon its testimony that we shall be justified or condemned.

4. Let us do penance for our sins.

5. Let us judge ourselves, and, according to the words of Saint Paul, we shall not be judged.

TWENTY-THIRD MEDITATION

THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT

It is appointed for men once to die, and after this the judgment.—Heb. ix. 27.

CONSIDERATION

Scarcely has man breathed his last, when his soul appears before God to render an account of all his actions, and to undergo a judgment which, being made by God himself, will be the most exact, the most circumstantial, and the most rigorous that it is possible to conceive.

Then even our good works will be examined as to whether they were done in the time and place and under the circumstances that God required, and whether they were accompanied by attention, fervor, and other suitable dispositions. Then also our affections and the desires of our hearts, the acts of the will, and the wanderings of the imagination, will be scrutinized; as also the use we have made of our senses—our sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. In a word, all sins will be made manifest to us. Sins of the eyes, by dangerous and perhaps criminal looks; sins of the taste, by over-indulgence in food or by excessive delicacy as to its quality, perhaps even by gluttony; sins of the hands, by prohibited actions of greater or less guilt;

sins of the tongue, not only by idle words, but by words contrary to charity, truth, and the edification which we owe our neighbor.

O God, what an examination to undergo, what an account to render! The conduct of our whole life must be compared with the duties of our state and profession, with the commandments of God and the Church. The soul must answer all the questions addressed to it on these points. What a number of faults and omissions, now considered trifling, will then be looked upon as very serious, because the soul will then see them as God himself sees them!

Before its eyes will be displayed the enormity of the capital sins—pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth; and it will be forced to confess against which of these it has sinned, and to what extent.

But this is not all; for the soul must be examined not only as to the graces with which it has been favored, but also as to those additional graces which it would have received had it corresponded to the former; the grace of baptism by which it was cleansed from original sin, clothed in the robe of innocence, and made a participator in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ; the grace of a Christian education, and all the means of salvation consequent thereon; the grace of first communion, by which Christ communicated himself to it in so intimate a manner; the graces of so many other communions, by which it might in a sense have been changed into its Lord; the graces of so many confessions restoring it to the friendship of God, and once more placing it in the way of salvation; the grace also of confirmation, which in the designs of the Lord was

intended to make it strong and courageous, and to defend it against all the attacks of its enemies; the grace of vocation to the religious life, by which God from among so many others called it from the world, to admit it to the closest intimacy with himself, to lead it to perfection and enable it to acquire countless merits for heaven, to this end heaping upon it the most signal favors. Alas! perhaps instead of entering into the views of God it suffered itself to be overcome by indolence, tepidity, and indifference; perhaps it buried its talent, instead of turning it to account; perhaps it added infidelity to infidelity, till it could no longer hope for a favorable sentence.

Last of all come those who bear witness against this soul. First appears the devil, who redoubles his efforts not to lose his prey, and represents it as more guilty than it really is. Then its angel guardian displays all his zeal in its favor if it be innocent; but if otherwise, he bitterly reproaches it for its abuse of his charitable solicitude.

But the most inexorable of all its accusers is its own conscience; that conscience which, like a vigilant sentinel, had given it warning on so many occasions, and repeated to it the words of the holy precursor to Herod: "What thou dost is not lawful;" those sentiments of remorse which had so often recalled it to its duty, brought it to the tribunal of penance, to seek forgiveness, to correct its faults and to strive to live a more holy life. What a frightful position for this soul if it be guilty! for it is constrained to accuse itself, and utter its own condemnation. What remains for it after this terrible examination, but to await the irrevocable

sentence? O what reason has the Church to call this day, *a day of wrath, a day of fear and terror.*[1]

APPLICATION

Let us anticipate the coming of that day, and make it a day of gladness. With this view, lest death surprise us when unprepared, let us put our conscience in order. "From what great danger mayst thou free thyself, from what great fear be rescued," exclaims the pious author of the "Imitation," "if only thou wouldst be always fearful and looking for death!"[2] If we wish then, to secure a favorable sentence from Jesus Christ, let us follow the advice of the apostle, and *judge ourselves;*[3] that is to say, let us carefully examine our conscience, and take the means necessary to amend whatever we find therein deserving of blame.

Let us carefully scrutinize our conduct, to discover whether there is anything there that might be to us a source of uneasiness. *I passed by the field of the slothful man, and by the vineyard of the foolish man; and behold, it was all filled with nettles; and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down.*[4] These words give us a vivid picture of the state of those who do not examine their consciences; for it is by such examination we discover the root of our vices, or pluck them up as soon as they appear, and thus prevent bad habits from becoming a second nature to us. Let us frequently consider that examination of conscience is the means best suited to calm our minds

[1]Office of the Dead. [2]Bk. I. Chap. xxiii. [3]1 Cor. xi. 31. [4]Prov. xxiv. 30, 31.

and prevent those terrors that precede or accompany the judgment that every man must undergo.

Besides our general examination, let us every day make a particular examination on our predominant passion, or on that to which we feel ourselves most inclined. Let us listen now to the reproaches of conscience, and not expose ourselves to its accusations before that Sovereign Judge who, when we shall appear in his presence, can give ear only to his justice, and not to that goodness and mercy which he exercises towards us in this life. Let us reflect that the abuse of his goodness and mercy will furnish us with an additional motive to dread that judgment, and that we religious, above all, shall be judged with the greater severity, the greater the superabundance of graces and means of sanctification which we have received.

PRAYER

O my Jesus, who art my Savior and my Judge, behold me prostrate at thy feet. I confess that I have deserved all the severity of thy vengeance, and am utterly unworthy of thy pardon; and yet, I venture to implore thy clemency through the merits of that precious blood which thou didst shed for me. I ask thy favor now while there is yet time, for when I shall be summoned before thy tribunal, the period of mercy will have passed. Then thy words will terrify me, if I shall have failed to profit by the merits of thy precious blood.

In thee, O my generous Redeemer, I place my trust, and I conjure thee to take pity on me, so that when

I shall appear before thee I may hear from thy lips those blessed words that shall admit me to celebrate with the saints thy never-ending mercies.

Résumé, page 175.

Immediately after death comes judgment, and a judgment most rigorous and severe. It shall embrace:

1. Our good works, which, perhaps, may not have been done as God would have them.

2. Our thoughts, our desires, our affections, so often reprehensible.

3. The use we shall have made of each of our senses.

4. Our little correspondence with the grace of God.

5. All the duties we may have neglected. O what a subject of terror for the guilty soul to see all its actions thus scrutinized and to have only the sentence of condemnation to expect!

Let us prevent this misfortune; and therefore,

1. Let us be penetrated with fear of this judgment.

2. Let us always correspond faithfully with grace.

3. Let us heed the voice of conscience.

4. Let us make our particular and our general examinations carefully.

5. Let us fervently implore the divine mercy.

TWENTY-FOURTH MEDITATION

JESUS CHRIST THE SUPREME JUDGE

It is he who hath been appointed by God to be the judge of the living and of the dead.—Acts x. 42.

CONSIDERATION

Jesus has been appointed Judge of the living and the dead. And to whom indeed could this office of Judge of men be more appropriately assigned than to him who is at once their Sovereign Lord, their Lawgiver, and their Model; who has merited for them the graces necessary to walk in his footsteps, to imitate his virtues, and to do his holy will; who was himself judged so iniquitously on the day of his Passion, and whom the wicked in their blasphemy presume to judge every day?

Jesus is Judge, and Judge of all: an all-powerful, independent, impartial, omniscient, and most righteous Judge; kind to the just, but severe and inexorable to the wicked. He is the omnipotent Judge before whom the earth trembles and the mountains melt away, who at the moment of death summons the soul before his tribunal, to hear the irrevocable sentence that must determine its fate for all eternity. And if the soul be guilty, oh! with what terror is the vile creature seized, in presence of its Master, whom it has outraged despite

his benefits and his most solemn promises and threats: outraged in his merits, in his blood, in his sacraments, in all the means of salvation which he provided for the soul; outraged in his commandments, and his clearly expressed will; outraged by the preference over him given to the world, the devil, and the flesh; outraged so often and in so many ways; outraged perhaps because of his very goodness. This is, indeed, a day of terror for the guilty soul. Whoever we be, then, let us fear that day which must soon dawn for all of us.

Jesus Christ, the omnipotent Judge, is also an independent Judge, who calls to his tribunal all men without distinction of rank or dignity: the great and the lowly, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the just and the unjust, all must come before him with their works in their hands. He will scrutinize their actions, and pass upon them an equitable sentence. He will not question men about what they could not do, but he will demand an account of the talents which he placed at their disposal; he will compare the number and value of their actions with the graces which he bestowed upon them; he will require four talents from him who had received two, ten talents from him who had received five.

This life is a period of mercy, in which Jesus acts as the most loving and the kindest of fathers, or rather as the good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep and who, when he has found it, puts it upon his shoulders and brings it back to the fold. But there comes at last an hour when justice, and not mercy, reigns supreme. During their life, Jesus calls upon sinners and offers them pardon; he knocks at the hearts of those even who

are most disobedient to his voice, and demands admittance to bring them peace, hope, and contentment. But when the days of grace are ended, he acts only as a strict and inexorable Judge, who cannot be influenced by bribes, who receives no excuses, who is neither swayed by favor nor moved by compassion, but who gives his decisions according to rigorous justice.

He is an omniscient Judge, who knows everything before the door of men's hearts are opened and their secrets are made manifest; a Judge to whom the most hidden things are unveiled and the most obscure things brought to light, to whom silence itself speaks, and who hears distinctly the most secret sighs of the heart; who by one glance discerns the thoughts and intentions of the soul, and analyzes a life, however long it may have been and however varied in character, who dissects, as it were, every act of the soul, discerning it in itself and in all its attendant circumstances.

He is a most holy Judge, or rather he is holiness itself, and he will examine how far we resemble him. He will lay before us his gospel, which is our law, and compare our conduct with it; he will recall to our memory the life which he led upon earth, and he will ask us if we have imitated it. He will judge even our good works, which in the language of Scripture,[1] are too often unclean in his eyes; for they are often done with culpable interior and exterior dispositions.

He is full of goodness towards those who have chosen him for their Master, who have served him with zeal and perseverance, and have endeavored to walk in his footsteps; but he is an object of terror to those who

[1]Isai. lxiv. 6.

have been ashamed of belonging to him, and have loved darkness more than light, falsehood more than truth, who have preferred vice to virtue, and the indulgence of their own appetites to the law of God. He is a Judge faithful both to his promises and to his threats; and after pronouncing the sentence of blessing on some and malediction on others, he immediately executes it, calling the just to share with him in the happiness of heaven, and hurling the reprobate into the abyss of hell.

APPLICATION

Let us frequently call to mind that Jesus Christ is our Judge, and that at the moment of death he will summon us before his tribunal. Let us then, labor diligently to secure to ourselves a favorable sentence. Let us adore him in his character of Supreme Judge, in which we must then behold him face to face; let us acknowledge and proclaim that to him alone does it belong to determine the future fate of all men, and to judge justice itself.

Let us faithfully serve him, as becomes those who are consecrated to his service. Let us do all that he requires of us readily and joyfully, and find our happiness in doing his holy will. Let us avoid every sin, every voluntary fault, and labor to correct our imperfections. Let us faithfully correspond to the abundant graces with which he has favored us. Let us be zealous for his glory, and let us practise the virtues proper to our vocation. O how many just grounds for a favorable sentence that teacher has, who devotes himself

with earnestness to the duty of making Jesus Christ known, loved, and served!

Let us not judge one another, but let us be charitable to all, remembering that our Lord has said: *Judge not, that you may not be judged. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. With what measure you have measured, it shall be measured to you again.*[1]

Let us receive the Sacrament of Penance with the necessary dispositions. Let us accuse ourselves sincerely of all our sins, and they will not be a subject of confusion to us at the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge. Let us carefully make use of all the means necessary to soften the rigor of God's judgment, and to merit from Jesus, our loving Savior, the grace of being admitted among the number of the blessed of his Father, who dwell in the home of everlasting happiness.

PRAYER

O Jesus, Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, remember what Thou hast suffered to merit for me the pardon of my sins. Help me by thy grace to serve thee with fervor, to do thy holy will with such exactness that I may hear at the day of judgment these consoling words: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. . . . Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*[1]

Résumé, page 175.

Jesus Christ has all right to judge men, whom he

[1] Matt. vii. 1; v. 7.

created, whom he redeemed, whom his father has made subject to him, to whom he has given his law, upon whom he has lavished his graces, for whom he died. Yes, Jesus is our Judge:

1. An omnipotent and independent Judge.
2. A Judge of all and in all things.
3. An impartial, enlightened, upright Judge.
4. A Judge most holy, who will examine our likeness or our unlikeness to himself.
5. A good Judge, affable to the just, but severe and inexorable to the wicked.

—Let us labor, then, to render him favorable to us.

1. Let us adore him as Supreme Judge.
2. Let us accomplish all that he wishes of us.
3. Let us be zealous for his glory.
4. Let us beware of judging our brethren, for he has said: "Judge not, and you shall not be judged."
5. Let us confess our sins with the most entire sincerity and the most lively contrition, and so obtain grace for the day when we shall appear before him.

TWENTY-FIFTH MEDITATION

JUDGMENT OF THE IMPERFECT RELIGIOUS

Thou sayest: I am rich . . . and have need of nothing: and thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.—Apoc. iii. 17.

CONSIDERATION

These are the words which Jesus Christ will address to the soul of the imperfect religious, when he will summon it before his tribunal to render an account both of all it has actually done for him who did so much for it, and of all he had reason to expect from it in return for the favors which he had lavished upon it. To such a soul he will say: *Thou sayest, I am rich . . . and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*[1]

He will say to it, as he did to the Jewish people: "What could I have done for thee that I have not done?" For from all eternity he had predestined it to his service, not only by virtue of baptism, but also by vocation to the religious life; he had given it courage to burst the bonds that attached it to the world; he had received it into his holy house, and admitted it even into the sanctuary; he had enriched it with graces and special favors. How many holy inspirations, virtuous

[1]Apoc. iii. 17.

thoughts, good counsels and examples, confessions and communions, and stings of remorse; especially, when it first began to relax in fervor!

While examining its conduct through life he will point out to this tepid and unfaithful soul its sloth, its negligence, its indifference, its careless and unmortified life, its want of vigilance over itself, its lack of zeal, both for its sanctification, and for regular observance and practices of piety. He will remind it of the obligations which it contracted voluntarily and fulfilled very imperfectly; the sacraments which it received without preparation and without fruit; the inspirations which it continually rejected, and the feelings of remorse which it disregarded.

Yes, the Divine Master will say to it: "What could I have done for thee that I have not done? And thou, what hast thou done for me? I have taken thee from Egypt by the sacrament of baptism; I have brought thee to a land of promise and benediction, by making thee participate in the advantages of a religious life. I have nourished thee with heavenly manna by the sacraments which I have instituted. My clemency has preceded, accompanied, and followed thee. I have put into thy hands all the weapons necessary to defend thee against thy enemies. Why, then, hast thou acted as if thou hadst abandoned my service? Why hast thou served me in a manner so unworthy of me and of my favors?

"I have asked of thee nothing that was above thy strength, nothing that thou couldst not easily perform with my abundant and constant help. Thou hast no reason then to complain of me; but hast thou not given

me abundant cause to complain of thee, and to address thee in language of reproach?

"What use hast thou made of the grace of baptism? Why hast thou not kept unstained the robe of innocence with which thou wast then clothed? Thy heart was then made the sanctuary of my graces; why didst thou profane it by thy remissness and sin? Thy body was the temple of my holy Spirit; why didst thou make it an instrument to offend me?

"My will was made known to thee, and yet often hast thou said like the devil: 'I will not obey.' My promises and threats have been repeated to thee, and thou hast scarcely made any account of them. Many souls have with the ordinary graces not only sanctified themselves but attained a high degree of perfection, in spite of repeated obstacles; and thou, remiss and sluggish soul, hast remained poor in the midst of abundance; thou hast been unfaithful, in spite of the numberless graces which I have heaped upon thee; thou hast been a useless tree in the garden of religion, and instead of fruits fit to be served at the heavenly table, thou hast produced only rotten figs and bitter grapes.

"Thy own words are thy condemnation. How often hast thou not avowed thy faults, asked pardon for them, and promised to do better? and still thou hast always put off till to-morrow the performance of thy good resolutions. Thou hast paid no attention to the threat which I addressed to each and every one in particular,—that I should come when least expected. At last that hour is at hand; now render an account of thy works."

Yes, such is the language in which God will reproach the soul of the lukewarm religious. O what regrets

will that soul then experience! How greatly will it deplore its indolence in the service of God! But alas! it will then be too late.

APPLICATION

Let us anticipate the day on which we must appear before him who will judge us according to the rigor of justice, and who will say to each of us: "What ought I to have done for thee that I have not done? and thou, what hast thou done for me, and how hast thou corresponded to my favors?"

Let us be more faithful and more devoted to him, the more graces we receive from his hands. Let not one of them be unfruitful in our souls; for it is not in vain that such favors have been lavished upon us; they must either serve for our sanctification or prove the source of our condemnation. St. Teresa, dreaded more the abuse she might have made of grace than the faults which she had actually committed. Let our hearts be penetrated with the same sentiment.

Let us cultivate the grace of our vocation, and perform exactly the duties of our holy state. Let us make our spiritual exercises with care, and draw from each the fruits of sanctification and salvation which it ought to produce. Let us examine our conscience frequently, and heed its just reproaches. Let us read our rules, and make all our actions conform thereto. Let us live up to our obligations, and reform in our lives whatever discrepancies we may find therein, whatever at the hour of death might draw down upon us the reproaches of our Sovereign Judge.

Let us mortify our passions, and live a spiritual, not a sensual, life; let us act through charity, not through self-love or affection for any creature. Let all be for Jesus from this very instant and forever, and we shall have nothing to fear when we shall be called to appear before him.

PRAYER

O my God, enter not into judgment with me after death. Remember that thou art my Father and Savior. Grant that my sufferings in this world may serve as an expiation for my sins, that I may have nothing to fear when I shall appear before thee.

O Lord, give ear only to thy great mercy and thy infinite goodness; be my support, my strength, and my consolation. Keep me in thy grace that when my soul shall quit this body of sin, it may be adorned with such virtues as will make it pleasing in thy eyes. Deign, O my Jesus, to speak to it these words of benediction: *"I am thy salvation.*[1] I apply to thee the merits of my sufferings and death; I myself will defend thee against the accusations of thy enemies. Come, O soul, dear to my Father, come to possess the kingdom prepared for my elect!"

Résumé, page 176.

How much reason the tepid religious has to dread his judgment!

1. Jesus Christ shall remind him of the graces which he has bestowed upon him.

2. He will demand what use he has made of them.

[1] Ps. xxxiv. 3.

3. He will ask for an accounting of all his negligence in the fulfillment of his duties.

4. He will show him a multitude of souls who, though favored with fewer graces, have persevered in fervor.

5. Yes, the tepid religious shall see that he has been, alas! only a barren tree in the garden of religion.

How great shall be his regret! But how vain! how futile!

—Do we wish to avoid this?

1. Let us be faithful to God's graces.

2. Let us cherish our vocation, let us fulfill its duties.

3. Let us acquit ourselves well of our spiritual exercises.

4. Let us often ask ourselves what we are before God.

5. Let us reform what displeases him in our conduct.

TWENTY-SIXTH MEDITATION

VAIN EXCUSES OF THE IMPERFECT RELIGIOUS

Judge between me and my vineyard.—Isai. v. 3.

CONSIDERATION

There are few imperfect religious, however irregular they may be, who have not good sentiments from time to time; who do not find themselves compelled, at least by circumstances, to enter into their hearts, acknowledge their remissness, and make good resolutions. It is, above all, these happy moments, these salutary inspirations of grace, that God will recall to the bad religious when reminding him of the many favors bestowed on him.

"Thou didst know thy duty," our Lord will say to him. "Often didst thou admit thy faults, often didst thou form the resolution of doing better because thou didst feel its necessity. Thou didst even make some progress in the way of virtue, particularly when thou didst enter into religion; thou didst wish to persevere in the right way, and die in the practice of holiness. Why, then, hast thou relaxed thy efforts? Why hast thou ceased to advance in the path of virtue? Why hast thou looked back after putting thy hand to the plough? Why has that, which was a duty for thee,

ceased to appear such? Didst thou then give thyself up to me only for a time, or only on condition that it would not cost thee trouble or suffering?

"Why have thy rules, which in the days of thy fervor appeared to thee something holy and sacred, become a dead letter, without power to bind thee? Why have those great motives of fear and hope which once kept thee true to thy obligations, become insignificant and contemptible in thy eyes? Why has my yoke, which is so light, and which thou didst formerly bear with courage, become too heavy for thee. Why, after having begun in the spirit, hast thou ended in the flesh? . . . . Be thy own judge, unfaithful religious, for I appeal to thy own conscience!

"During the time of retreat—and thou hast made many retreats—thou didst acknowledge thy faults, thou didst confess them; thou didst wish to change thy life, to be more modest, more recollected, more watchful over thy senses, more reserved in thy relations with the world, more attentive to thy duties, more sincere in thy manifestation of conduct, more contrite in thy confessions, more fervent in thy communions, more edifying to thy community and thy pupils. And yet, after each of these promises, thou didst almost always relapse into the same faults, into the same indifference to thy salvation, into the same lukewarmness.

"Wouldst thou wish to allege thy weakness? But I shall answer thee: Didst thou ask me to give thee the necessary strength? and didst thou avoid the occasions of sin? Thou wast indeed weak; thou shouldst therefore have watched and prayed, and not exposed thyself

rashly to danger. Wouldst thou seek to allege thy occupations as an excuse for having neglected the care of thy salvation? But the law does not forbid labor, it only requires that labor be sanctified, and this thou didst well know. Why hast thou not acted according to thy knowledge? Besides, couldst thou be ignorant that salvation is the great affair, the first and only business of man?

"Wouldst thou urge thy want of experience? But thou oughtest then to have mistrusted thyself, and consulted thy spiritual advisers. Wouldst thou plead the example of some remiss and irregular religious? But didst thou not know that they were doing wrong? and on the other hand, hadst thou no good examples to follow? Why, then, hast thou shunned the company of those whose influence might have led thee to live a good life, and why hast thou formed friendships and intimacies with such as flattered thy inclinations, such as proved stumbling blocks in thy path, and such as thou didst know were likely to lead thee astray?

"Wouldst thou plead thy youth, and thy hope of return to me to make a good confession and begin a new life? But didst thou not know that it is written: *Be you also ready, for at what hour you think not the Son of man will come?*[1] How many young persons have been, to thy own knowledge, surprised by death? Thou hast trembled for them, but unfortunately thou hast not trembled for thyself!

"Tell me, rather, that thou hast allowed thy heart to grow cold, that thou hast gradually abandoned the

[1]Luke xii. 40.

observance of thy rule, that thou hast suffered thyself to fall into a remiss and indolent life, that thou hast become the slave of thy senses.

"Thou hast allowed thyself indulgences, not only unbecoming thy vocation, but unworthy even of men who live in the world,—imprudent glances or such ill-advised friendships and intimacies as should never have been contracted, or at least should have been dissolved at the first reproach of conscience. Thou hast been eager to see and hear everything, and to mix in society; and through thy senses, the world has taken possession of thy heart and turned thee away from virtue. Thou hast sought opportunities for evil, thou hast made use of them at the sacrifice of duty; and those opportunities have proved fatal to thee. Instead of manifesting thy conscience to thy confessor who would have stretched out a helping hand to thee, thou hast concealed thy wretchedness from him, and consequently thou hast fallen into the pit which the devil had dug for thee. The evil done is then the work of thy own hands, thou hast thyself to blame for the condition in which thou appearest before me, and for which thou must answer to my eternal justice.

"How different would have been thy state, hadst thou been faithful to my counsels; hadst thou profited by all my graces, and the many inspirations bestowed on thee, the interior lights to guide thee, the stings of conscience to warn thee, the good example given thee, and the many exhortations made thee! What confidence shouldst thou now have, hadst thou profited by thy many confessions, whereas thou hast failed to correct thyself of even one of thy faults; and by the many

communions from which, alas! thou hast derived no benefit!"

APPLICATION

Let us to-day judge our excuses in the light in which we shall see them when we stand before God's tribunal, and not in the light of our passions. Oh! what will then be the sentiments of a religious soul that has been lukewarm in God's service, and that, yielding to spiritual sloth, has under frivolous pretences, lulled itself into a false security? How ardently at that terrible moment it will wish that it had used violence in subduing its corrupt nature and mastering its evil inclinations! that it had generously observed its rule and never sought excuses to be dispensed from obligations. Were there still time left it, with what earnestness it would apply itself to the practice of all its duties!

And yet such may be the state of our soul. Let us do now what we should then wish to have done; let us now gain the favor of our Judge, by a sincere return to his service; let us take him for model whilst we live, so that after death he may be to us only a Savior.

Let us live in salutary dread of God's judgments, let us think of the account that we must render after death, and say often with the Church:

> "What shall guilty I then plead,
> Who for me will intercede,
> When the saints shall comfort need?"[1]

Let us renew our first fervor, overcome our repugnances,

[1]Dies Irae.

and make such sacrifices as conscience requires of us. Let us break off the habits that might lead us to destruction, and we shall spare ourselves in a future life regrets that will be the more bitter, because we shall feel that they are unavailing.

PRAYER

I acknowledge before thee, O dear Jesus, the futility, or rather the folly, of such vain excuses as I might allege to justify a conduct that has been remiss, lukewarm, and full of defects; for it is only from the practice of my duty that I can derive any confidence on the day when I shall appear before thy tribunal.

Assist me, by thy grace, to observe faithfully both thy law and the rules of my holy state; to correct my evil inclinations, become fervent in my prayers, and have nothing so much at heart as to serve thee in future with all the fidelity in my power. These favors I ask of thee by thy own infinite merits, and through the intercession of Mary, my good and kind Mother.

Résumé, page 176.

What excuse can the imperfect religious offer on the day of judgment?

1. His weakness? He was asked to do only what he could and might have done.

2. Perverted inclinations and the temptations of the devil? Abundance of grace was giver him to overcome them.

3. The seductions of the world? He ought to have fled from them.

4. The examples of the lax? A hundred times he

was admonished not to imitate them; and besides, he had, as a counterpoise, the example of the fervent.

5. The hope of being converted later? Jesus Christ has said: "Be ye ready."

—Let us not, then, deceive ourselves:

1. Let us judge our conduct as it is in God's sight, and not as it appears to ourselves.

2. Let us not excuse ourselves.

3. Let us sustain our fervor.

4. Let us reform our conduct.

5. Let us call to mind that we prepare for ourselves the judgment that we shall have to undergo.

TWENTY-SEVENTH MEDITATION

JUDGMENT OF THE JUST SOUL

Fear not, for I am with thee.—Isai. xliii. 5.

CONSIDERATION

If, in the Holy Scriptures, God frequently menaces us with the severity of his judgments, it is because he is anxious not to exercise it in our regard, but to induce us to take precautions against it. If he shows himself so terrible, it is to testify his interest in us, and to induce us to lead so holy a life as may prepare us for a happy death and a favorable sentence at his tribunal. He who has said, *I desire not the death of the wicked*,[1] assuredly, and with still more reason, wills not the death of him who both serves him faithfully and ardently desires so to serve him all the days of his life.

We cannot doubt that judgment will be terrible to him whom death has surprised in the state of mortal sin, and therefore in a state of enmity with his Judge; but just as certainly will it be merciful and consoling, to the just man who, by his fidelity and piety, shall have made him his friend. He will seem to stand not before a strict and inflexible Judge, but before the kindest of Fathers; and consequently what can he fear?

[1] Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

The prodigal son was guilty; but because he repented, he was received by his father with kindness and affection. The parable furnishes a motive of confidence, not only to him who may have preserved his innocence, but also to him who repents of his sins, however numerous and grievous they may have been. Let both, then, hope for a favorable sentence, a sentence that will be a blessing, by assuring to them a happy immortality; for heaven is promised equally to innocence never sullied by sin, and to innocence restored by repentance.

It is written in the Apocalypse: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,*[1] that is to say, blessed are they who, having continually striven to die to themselves, have always lived in the presence of God; and blessed are they who, after having been buried in sin, have risen again to a life of grace. The judgment that follows death is only their formal adoption into the society of the saints, their title admission to the enjoyment of eternal felicity, in which the elect participate, and to the inheritance which Christ has merited for them by his sufferings and death upon the cross.

We should not then be astonished at the peace of mind enjoyed by the just man on his death-bed, nor at his exclamation in the words of the royal prophet: *I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the house of the Lord.*[2] "O how I now rejoice," might he add, "that in all I did I sought only the greater glory of God and my own salvation! How I rejoice that I listened to the voice that called upon me to enter into my heart, to be sincerely converted and to persevere in virtue! How I rejoice that by a good

[1]Apoc. xiv. 13. [2]Ps. cxxi. 1.

confession I purified my soul of the sins I had the misfortune to commit! How I rejoice that I overcame that temptation that would have drawn me into the road that leads to perdition! O how I rejoice that I chose for my inheritance and my all the Lord who will be not only my Judge, but also my eternal recompense!"

The fear of judgment does not trouble the just man in his last moments. He knows how true are the words of the Psalmist, *Thy justice is as the mountains of God; thy judgments are a great deep;*[1] but he knows also that this God of infinite goodness has solemnly promised that those who judge themselves shall not be judged; that he has said: *Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and sin shall not be your ruin,*[2] but I will show you mercy; be converted to me, and I will turn to you; judge yourselves and you shall not be judged." Therefore, it is, that he is filled with confidence, and he seems to hear these words: "Come to me, faithful and penitent soul, *enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*[3]

How happy he then is, and with what transports of joy he exclaims with St. Paul: *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*:[4] and with the royal prophet: *My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord.*[5] In his eyes, death is only the beginning of our true life, the moment of our birth in heaven.

Yes, it is with reason that the prophet declares: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints;*[6] precious, because it confirms them in the love of God; precious, because it merits for them the happiness of

[1]Ps. xxxv. 7. [2]Ezech. xviii. 30. [3]Matt. xxv. 21.
[4]Philip i. 21. [5]Ps. lxxxiii. 3. [6]Ps. cxv. 15.

hearing from the mouth of the Sovereign Judge the sentence that secures their eternal happiness: "Come, ye blessed of my Father; come, good and faithful servants, come to receive the recompense promised to fidelity in my service. You have accomplished my work; you have fulfilled your mission; you have turned to account the talents which I entrusted to you; you have courageously and constantly fought against the enemies of your salvation, and gained many glorious victories over them. Come and receive the palm awarded to conquerors, and share in my happiness: *Come, possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world;*[1] and which as far as depended upon you, you have merited, by your co-operation with my grace."

APPLICATION

Let us fear the judgment of God, for it will be full of terror to the sinner; but let us at the same time give room to confidence, for he who is to pronounce the sentence will be to us both Father and Friend, if we shall have answered his appeal, and in the sincerity of our hearts have striven to please him alone. Let us be sincerely converted to him, and he will no more remember our iniquities, nor shall we have reason to fear his sentence of malediction on that day, when he shall summon us to appear before his supreme tribunal. O what joy will be ours, what transports of delight we

[1]Matt. xxv. 34.

will experience, when we shall hear these words: *Come, ye blessed of my Father!*[1]

What shall we then think of the mortifications which we have imposed upon ourselves, of the spiritual exercises which we have performed with fervor, of the worldly enjoyments which we have renounced? What value we shall then set on the penances which we have practised, and by which we have so satisfied the justice of God, as to leave room only for his mercy!

Let us now entertain the same sentiments, and let us act as we shall then wish to have acted. Let us live holily; let us judge ourselves, and condemn ourselves, for thereby we shall escape condemnation on the last day. Let us accuse ourselves sincerely and contritely at the tribunal of penance, and we shall assuredly be justified at the tribunal of Christ.

PRAYER

O my Jesus, I realize that it is of sovereign importance for me to prepare for the day of judgment. Grant that I may labor unceasingly for this purpose, that I may faithfully accomplish thy holy will in everything, and that persevering in thy love, I may, at the moment of my death, hear from thy divine lips, O good Father, these words which are the sole object of my desires: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you.*[1]

O Mary, my good and loving Mother, pray for me to thy divine Son, that he may be a merciful judge to me,

[1] Matt. xxv. 34.

and pronounce on me the sentence of eternal happiness.

O glorious St. Joseph, patron of a good death, pray for me: obtain by thy powerful intercession that I may die the death of the saints, and that my judgment may be such as to admit me to heaven, there to bless with thee the mercy of God forever.

Résumé, page 177.

Judgment has nothing terrible for the just.

1. God, who has said, "I will not the death of a sinner," will certainly be merciful towards souls of good will.

2. "Blessed," said the Holy Spirit, "are the dead who die in the Lord."

3. The just man when dying has every reason to rejoice, for he is going to appear before his Friend, his Benefactor, his Father.

4. Hence, how many of the saints, when near their end, repeated with David: "I rejoice, because it has been said to me, We shall go into the house of the Lord!"

5. They were about to hear from the lips of Jesus Christ the sentence of supreme benediction!

—Let us labor, then, that we also may deserve to hear it.

1. Let us be converted sincerely and without delay.
2. Let us faithfully observe the law of God.
3. Let us keep our holy Rules.
4. Let us fear sin more than death.
5. Let us love Jesus, and labor for his glory.

TWENTY-EIGHTH MEDITATION

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION

In the last day I shall rise out of the earth.—Job xix. 25.

CONSIDERATION

Let us in imagination picture the terrors of that hour when God, manifesting to men the justice of his conduct and his judgments, will command the souls of all men in heaven or in hell to return to earth and be clothed with the bodies which they had animated during their time of trial.

Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment! will the angel of God cry out, the messenger of him who is the Master of life and death: and all men will obey that order, and arise immediately. Yes, the souls of all men, of both the good and the bad, will re-enter the bodies with which they were united on earth, as God has revealed in the Holy Scriptures: *I know,* says Job, *that my Redeemer liveth; and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth: and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God.*[1]

Let us now consider what will take place on that terrible day, and first of all let us represent to ourselves the wicked summoned from hell to resume their bodies. What a picture they present for meditation!

[1]Job xix. 25, 26.

Let us, with the eyes of imagination, behold those unhappy souls as they come forth in millions to seek the bodies that were in part the cause of their ruin, and bear about them the revolting signs of reprobation and despair. With what repugnance they look upon their nauseous corpses that through all eternity must be the companions of their torments as they had been the instruments of their crimes! Let us bear in mind that their repugnance is greater than that which the most sensitive and delicate of men would here experience were he cast into a common sewer or bound to a putrid carcass.

And yet, the soul that has been the slave of sensuality must re-enter this hideous mass of abomination; it must re-animate those hands that helped it to commit sin, those feet that led it whither it ought not to have gone, those eyes that looked upon vanity and allowed death to enter, those ears that listened with pleasure to words against charity, perhaps even against holy purity, and that heart that beat only for the world when every throb should have been offered up to God.

The guilty soul will recognize in this hideous corpse stretched upon the ground the vile companion of its eternal misery. At the sight it would gladly flee away, but a powerful hand, an irresistible force, compels it to enter that loathsome prison, which, throughout eternity, will be the more insupportable to it, the more pleasure it may have taken in it during the days of its mortal life. Yes, it will be compelled to enter that body, and to appear with it before all men. What shame, what regret, what agony! But shame, regret, and agony will then be all in vain.

"O wretched body! that didst draw me into sin;" the soul will exclaim; "thou art now to share my punishment!" But well might the body answer: "It is thou that art the criminal, for thou didst order the crime and devise the means; it is thou that hast ruined me. Yes, I shall share thy punishment, but I will make thee pay dearly for the pleasures which thou didst enjoy through me. Enter this everlasting prison which is already on fire with the breath of an angry God."

Behold in this picture the certain fate of all who remain indifferent to the things of eternity, and live only for time; who forget the care of their souls to think only of their bodies, and who plunge into the depths of vice, giving themselves up to the guilty pleasures of the flesh. Behold the certain fate of libertines and worldlings, who care only for the body and have no other occupation than that of pampering and worshipping the flesh. Behold, in a word, the certain fate of all whom death shall have surprised in mortal sin.

Since both soul and body were associated in crime whilst upon earth, it is necessary that they share disgrace, torments and despair hereafter. They must appear before the universe bearing all the marks of the vices and crimes of which they have been guilty. O what a spectacle will the multitude of the damned present! Behold that countless host of criminals bearing on their foreheads the ineffaceable brand of everlasting damnation; behold them, like pillars of fire, devoured by the flames of hell, and compelled to range themselves at the left of the throne of Him who will come to judge the living and the dead. What a fright-

ful assemblage! O woe! a thousand times woe to those who shall be condemned to be of their number!

On the other hand, the souls of the elect will come from heaven to resume their bodies, the precious relics which they left upon earth; for the sacred members of their bodies are destined to share the unending happiness of their souls. With what pleasure will they be again united to those glorious remains which are destined to shine like stars for all eternity! Each of these souls may well address in these terms the body which it is about to reanimate: "O thou through whom I have served my God and accomplished his law, who hast co-operated with me in the work of my sanctification, come forth from the arms of death, from which thou art forever delivered, and share my happiness. Come to the heavenly Jerusalem, where, exalted above thy nature, thou wilt share my everlasting felicity." To this the body might answer: "Be thou blessed, O faithful soul, who during the days of our trial didst keep me in the path of virtue, and didst make use of me to glorify God. O how profitable have thy severities been to me! Behold I shall participate in the glory of the resurrection of our Lord, and with thee enjoy the happiness which he has merited for his elect."

Behold the just risen again; behold that glorious army advancing in triumph to the right hand of the Sovereign Judge to be associated with him in pronouncing sentence upon the world, and to receive from his lips the call to share in his infinite happiness. "Then," as the author of the "Imitation" wisely remarks, "shall the flesh that was afflicted exult more than if it had

always fared in delights. . . . Then shall simple obedience be more highly exalted than all worldly cunning. . . . Then shalt thou find more consolation in having prayed devoutly than in having feasted daintily. Then shalt thou rejoice more in having kept silence than for having made long discourses or talked much. Then shall strictness of life and hard penance please more than all the delights of earth."[1]

APPLICATION

Christian soul, dost thou now understand how much virtue will benefit thee? Dost thou wish to share the fate of the reprobate, and not rather the happiness of the elect? Dost thou wish on the day of resurrection to enter a sinful body destined to the flames of hell, or, on the contrary, one worthy in some sort to adorn Paradise? Dost thou wish to enter a hideous and loathsome corpse, or a body resplendent with light and beauty? Dost thou wish to be covered with confusion along with the countless horde of Christ's enemies, and not rather to triumph with him and his saints?

Life and death are offered to thee, it is thine to choose. If thou causest the old man within thee to die, if thou dost mortify thy senses, if thou dost make war upon thy inclinations, thou wilt enjoy a life of unending happiness. If, on the other hand, thou dost pamper thy body and become its slave, if thou seekest to satisfy thy every desire, a state worse than death will be thy inheritance forever.

[1]Bk. I. Chap. xxiv.

PRAYER

O my God, if thou hadst struck me down when I was forsaking thy service, what a fate would have been mine! In what a condition would I on the last day rise from the dead! My soul, sullied by sin, would then be compelled to re-enter the hideous body which it had used as an instrument to offend thee, and thy angels would have placed me at thy left hand with the reprobate. But undying thanks be to thee, thou didst take pity on me, thou didst open my eyes, give me time to return to thee and do penance.

I will profit by this precious time, O Lord, to merit by a holy life the glorious resurrection which will be the inheritance of thy elect. I beg of thee this grace by the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the intercession of his most holy Mother.

Résumé, page 177.

Let us represent to ourselves in the liveliest manner possible what shall come to pass at the general resurrection.

1. The Angel of God shall sound the trumpet.
2. All souls shall again be united to their bodies.
3. The souls of the just shall animate bright and glorious bodies; those of the wicked, hideous and frightful bodies.
4. The souls of the just shall congratulate their bodies, the instruments of their virtues; those of the wicked shall curse theirs, the instruments of their vices.
5. All shall take their place: the good, as faithful sheep, on the right of Jesus Christ; and the wicked, as unclean goats, on the left.

—What shall our lot then be?

1. Shall we deserve to be raised to eternal life?
2. In what state shall our body be?
3. What shall be stamped on our forehead?
4. With whom shall we be associated?
5. What place shall we have?

Let us consider that the answer depends upon our fidelity to God.

TWENTY-NINTH MEDITATION

THE RISEN DEAD AWAIT THEIR JUDGE

Look up, and lift up your heads.—Luke xxi. 28.

CONSIDERATION

Let us consider how all men, from Adam, our first parent, to the last of his descendants, having risen again, will in an instant be transported, by divine omnipotence, to the place fixed upon for the general judgment, and placed according to their deserts, either on the right or the left of the Sovereign Judge. What a spectacle will there be presented by this assembly of all mankind, the good and the bad, the saints and the reprobate, awaiting the coming of him who is to pronounce the final sentence fixing the eternal destiny of each!

Let us picture to ourselves two great eminences facing each other; let us imagine them covered by the whole human race, the rich and the poor, the mighty and the lowly, the learned and the ignorant. On one side are placed the good, whose bodies, arrayed in glory, are gifted with immortality, resplendent with beauty, and surrounded by a light more brilliant than that of the sun. All are tranquil and happy; like good children, they await with holy impatience the arrival of a kind and merciful Father who is about to crown their

triumph, to extol their virtues in the presence of all nations, and conduct them to the abode of everlasting happiness.

Let us contemplate them raising their hands to heaven and joyfully calling upon their Sovereign Judge. Let us hear them repeat with the beloved disciple: *Come, Lord Jesus;*[1] come to crown with eternal happiness, according to thy promise, those who, aided by thy grace, have tenderly loved and faithfully served thee. Come, O most tender Father, come to pronounce the sentence of benediction upon thy elect. Come, O Jesus, our gentle Savior, and bring us all to thee: we have belonged to thee in time; let us be united to thee in eternity."

On the other side, let us consider the wicked torn by remorse and become insupportable even to themselves. They would have preferred remaining in the eternal fires of hell, to assisting at the fearful judgment to which they are now to be subjected. They call upon death, *and death shall fly from them;*[2] they invoke annihilation, and only eternity meets their gaze; they sigh for darkness, and they are forced to remain in the light radiating from the countenances of the elect; and although perfectly certain of their fate, they nevertheless are seized with fear while waiting for him who is to pronounce their final sentence of condemnation and see the gates of hell so soon to close upon them forever. "Ye mountains," they will cry out, "fall upon us, hide us from the face of that God who has been so good to us, but whom we have forced to become a strict and implacable Judge. Hide us, remove

[1]Apoc. xxii. 20. [2]Apoc. ix. 6.

us from the sight of the just whom we despised upon earth, and to whom we are now made objects of horror: we treated them as fools and madmen, when they alone were walking in the path of wisdom and goodness."

But the reprobate will have no means of hiding themselves from the eyes of God and men: they will be forced to remain and endure the gaze of the elect whilst waiting for the coming of Jesus, their Savior, whom they not only refused to love, but even betrayed by preferring to Him vain pleasures and deceitful riches; that Jesus who was so good to them during life, but who is now an avenging God, ready to pronounce, in the face of the world, the sentence of their condemnation.

O what will then be the indignation of the proud at seeing themselves utterly despised, and despised by all men, both the good and the wicked; at seeing themselves everywhere rejected as wretches deserving everlasting shame! What will the rich man think of his riches, which he abused and made his idol, when he sees himself deprived of everything and reduced to the most frightful poverty forever? What will the wretch who sought to gratify every sense and inclination think of the pleasures of life when he shall see awaiting him a devouring fire, unending suffering, and weeping, and gnashing of teeth?

What will then be the sentiments of that lukewarm Christian who, through human respect, neglected his duties? What will he think when he is about to appear before the God whom he had not the courage to serve, when he knows that all his sins are already exposed to the eyes of the world?

How bitter will be the regret of him who has not

been sincere in his confessions, when he reflects that by a candid avowal to the priest he might have effaced all his sins, and removed them forever from the sight of God! What will he then think of his condition, and of the everlasting fate reserved for him? With what feelings he will await the coming of the great King to judge him; of the God from whom he had received so many graces, but whom he was unwilling to know, love, and serve!

But what must be the thoughts of a religious who, at that moment, finds himself on the left of his Judge; who, in spite of all the spiritual characters imprinted on his soul, in spite of his vows, his promises, the sacraments which he received, the graces with which he was favored, and the means of salvation abundantly bestowed on him, finds himself ranked with the wicked! O what a situation! what terror and despair must be his!

No, no! the agony of a criminal in this world, upon whom the court is about to pass sentence of condemnation, is in no way to be compared with that of the sinner awaiting Jesus Christ, who for the last time is about to come in the clouds of heaven, in all the splendor of his divinity, to judge the living and the dead!

APPLICATION

We are so eager for distinction, so sensitive as to a point of honor, so eager to defend ourselves against every insinuation, so skillful in excusing our faults, that it seems to us hard to live with one who does

not esteem us, and in whose eyes we have lost all honor and reputation; and yet, by sin we expose ourselves to the danger of being covered on the last day with greater shame than it is possible for us now to conceive.

How great will be the confusion of the wicked when obliged to appear before the universe in their true characters, in all their deformity of soul and all their corruption of heart, and to find that they inspire nothing but contempt and execration in all!

We shudder at the mere thought of so great a misfortune. Let us, then, prevent it by avoiding everything that could sully our souls, and by seeking only what is pleasing to God. Let us cast away sin from us now, that it may not cling to us on the day of judgment. Let us humble ourselves during life, that we may escape humiliation after death. Let us serve God now with fidelity, inclining his mercy toward us, so that he may then spare us the frightful effects of his justice. Let us love Him during life as a Father and Friend, that we may not find in him after death an inexorable Judge. Let us suffer none but him to reign in our hearts and let us make it our delight to live with him, so that when time shall be no more we may not dread his coming in his majesty.

PRAYER

I tremble with fear, O my God, when I transport myself in spirit to that ever-memorable spot, that valley of Jehoshaphat which thou hast chosen as the place where thou wilt solemnly pronounce sentence upon all

mankind. I ask myself what place shall I occupy there? Shall it be at thy right hand or at thy left? Shall I await thee as my Father, my Friend, my Redeemer? Or shall I, alas! look upon thee only as the avenger of my crimes? . . .

O grant, I beseech thee, in thy mercy, that I may be faithful to thy precepts and love thee with all my heart and strength, so that my soul being adorned with Christian virtues, and strengthened by thy grace, I may say then with confidence, as I do now: *Come, Lord Jesus,*[1] come!

Résumé, page 178.

What a spectacle is that of the risen dead! What a meeting with their Judge! What different sentiments prevail among the just and the wicked!

1. Behold the joy of the just: they expect their Father.

2. Consider the terror of the wicked: they expect their Judge, the avenger of their crimes.

3. The good shall say: "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

4. The wicked shall call on the mountains to fall upon them, and hell to swallow them, to hide them from the eyes of the Supreme Judge.

5. How the good shall rejoice over their conduct on earth! How the wicked shall bewail theirs!

—And we, in what sentiments shall we expect the Sovereign Judge?

1. Shall it be with joy or with terror?
2. Shall we see in him the rewarder of our virtues?
3. Shall we see in him the avenger of our crimes?
4. With what sentiments shall we be animated?
5. Our works will decide.

[1]Apoc. xxii. 20.

THIRTIETH MEDITATION

THE NECESSITY OF THE GENERAL JUDGMENT

He shall judge the world with justice and the people with his truth.—Ps. xcv. 13.

CONSIDERATION

Faith teaches us that besides the particular judgment which God pronounces upon the soul immediately after its separation from the body, there will be also a general judgment, at which all men will be called upon to render a public and solemn account of each of their actions during life, and at which everything will be revealed to the whole universe. Moreover, this judgment is necessary to manifest to all men the wisdom, the goodness, and the justice of God in the affairs of this world. For man, in his ignorance and passion, dares summon God himself before the tribunal of weak human reason, and demand of him why he sometimes afflicts the just and leaves the guilty to triumph, why he gives abundance to some and scarcity to others. God's motives for so doing will be revealed on this great day, and men will acknowledge that nothing in the dispensations of Providence was more according to rule and order than what appeared to them to be veritable disorder.

But the general judgment is necessary not only to justify God's conduct in the events of this world, but also to dispense justice among men, to glorify the good and overwhelm the wicked with confusion. And, in fact, how many acts of virtue are there not of which only God has knowledge! How many alms given by the right hand, of which the left hand knows nothing! How many sacrifices offered to God in the depths of solitude remain unknown to men! Would it be fitting that all these good actions should be hidden from men; that those who did them should not receive glory and esteem in proportion to their efforts to conceal their virtues?

How many heroic sacrifices have drawn upon those who made them only opprobrium and injury! How many pious souls, in recompense for their saintly lives, have had only mockeries and insults! How many Josephs, how many Susannahs have been cast into prison by justice, jealousy and hatred! How many innocent persons have been treated as criminals, without ever having it in their power to prove their innocence! How many noble actions have sunk into oblivion! Can it be that all these injustices should lie hidden and be unatoned for by public honor done to those who had been their victims?

Has the world ever understood the zeal of the apostles, the courage of the martyrs, the constancy of the confessors and virgins? Have not the faithful servants of Christ been treated at all times as outcasts of the world? It is, then, just that they be the more exalted and glorified, the more they have been misjudged and despised.

On the other hand, it is equally just that the conduct of the wicked should be exhibited in its true colors; that the mask worn by the hypocrite to impose on the world should be torn away; that the many crimes done in secret, bringing neither shame nor remorse to their authors, should be revealed to the world; that he who gave scandal should be brought face to face with the victims of his misconduct, and receive from them the most bitter and stinging reproaches; that the apostle of error and falsehood should be confounded, and compelled in the presence of all men to do homage to truth. "Yes," say the Fathers of the Church, "it belongs to the justice of God that there be a day on which the mysteries of iniquity will be unveiled, and the mask of hypocrisy raised, to show to the whole world all the baseness of sinners!"

All things will then be put in their proper place: innocence will be exalted and villainy confounded. This will be the last act in the great drama of the world, an act full of glory for the just, but of terror for the wicked! Alas! why do these unfortunates not realize this now? Why do they not make every effort to return to the ways of justice and persevere therein, and thus avoid the confusion which will otherwise overwhelm them on the last day?

Men may deceive others; they may even deceive themselves; but God, from whom nothing is hidden, reads the innermost secrets of the heart, and on the last day he will make them manifest to all. *I will discover thy shame to thy face,*[1] says he to the sinner. "I will unveil thy malice, thy infamy, and all the filth

[1]Nahum iii. 5.

of thy corrupted heart and degraded soul; I will make thee known as thou art, not only to those whose opinions thou mightest disregard, but also to those whose favor thou wouldst wish to enjoy; to those whom thou hast so deceived by thy tricks and hypocrisy; that they have become the panegyrists of thy false virtue . . . I will make thee known not only to these, but also to thy relatives and friends, to nations and kingdoms,—in a word, to the whole universe. Yes, I will fix upon thee the eyes of all rational creatures, of angels and men and devils, and all will see into the most secret recesses of thy heart; they will see thee as thou art, not as thou shalt wish to appear."

And he who speaks thus to the sinner is *the searcher of hearts and reins.*[1] He is not only Truth itself, but also Omnipotence: whatever he says is done at the hour and moment which he has appointed. If it be just that God should manifest to all men the merits of the elect and win the admiration of the whole universe for their acts of virtue, it is also just that the conduct of sinners should be revealed. How many vices at present unknown and hidden from man, how many false virtues honored and proclaimed as genuine, will then be shown in their true colors! What a subject of shame and despair to sinners! What means of escape will be left them on that terrible day?

They shall say to the mountains, cover us; and to the hills, fall upon us,[2] to hide them from the eyes of God, the angels, and men. Useless prayers! That God who, without consulting them, raised them from the dust and corruption of the tomb, to appear before his tribunal,

[1]Ps. vii. 10. [2]Osee x. 8; Luke xxiii. 30.

will know how to reveal, in spite of them, the depths of their heart, and as to manifest their iniquities to all men, as to overwhelm them with shame a thousand times more frightful than death itself.

APPLICATION

O thou who, with no other witness than thyself, with no other reproaches than those of thy own conscience, canst not endure to think without shame of thy conduct; who hast not the courage to declare all thy faults at the tribunal of penance, or who dost hesitate to do so, while pride suffers not the words to pass thy lips; thou who takest so much care to hide thy sins from every eye, and dost become alarmed at the least danger of detection; who canst not endure to be suspected of a fault of any consequence, and who wouldst think thyself lost if judged capable of what thou really hast done; what will be thy feelings when the Sovereign Judge will make known thy wickedness to all the world? How astonished will those be whose esteem thou hast sought! What reproaches wilt thou not secure from those whom thou hast deceived! Open thy eyes now to the truth; think of what confusion may be thine on the last day, and prevent it by a sincere confession and a truly penitent life.

PRAYER

How foolish would I be, O my God, if, to escape a slight confusion before a priest bound to the most inviolable secrecy, I were to be insincere in confessing my

sins, and thus place myself under the necessity of having them revealed to all men on the great day of judgment!

No, my God, I will not expose myself to the great humiliation and suffering which such conduct would bring upon me. I will confess my sins sincerely and with true contrition; I will watch over my senses, my thoughts, and my heart, so as never more to offend thee, but, on the contrary, to merit a share in the glory of thy elect.

Résumé, page 178.

Besides the particular judgment, God has decreed a general judgment, to be preceded by the manifestation of consciences. He has decreed it:

1. In order to fulfill the words of Jesus Christ: "There is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed."

2. To make known to all men the order of his providence towards each and all.

3. To glorify the good and avenge them for the contempt and oppression of the wicked.

4. To confound the wicked, and render them objects of the just contempt of angels and men.

5. To pronounce before all mankind those two sentences which shall decide the everlasting destiny of all men, the equity of which each one shall acknowledge and proclaim.

—Penetrated with these truths,

1. Let us adore the wisdom of God in appointing the general judgment.

2. Let us prepare ourselves to receive favorable judgment.

3. Let us make ourselves well known to our confessor, and we shall not have to dread the manifestation of consciences.

4. Let us repent sincerely of our faults, and they shall be forgotten.

5. Let us avoid sin, for it is the only way to escape the terrors of judgment.

THIRTY-FIRST MEDITATION

MANIFESTATION OF CONSCIENCES

And all the churches shall know that I am he who searcheth the reins and hearts.—Apoc. ii. 23.

CONSIDERATION

All the nations of the universe being assembled in the place appointed for the general judgment, the good at the right hand and the bad at the left, the coming of the Sovereign Judge will be announced by a shining light which will go before him as if to enlighten his way; soon after, choirs of angels will proclaim his approach; and last of all, he will appear with his cross, a thousand times more brilliant than the sun. Then *every eye shall see him;*[1] all men will behold him, but with what different feelings! The good will rejoice at his approach, like children at the coming of a loving father; the wicked will wither up with fear, for they will see in him only an inexorable Judge.

O happy friends of Jesus, continue in tranquillity; he is your King, and he is coming to associate you with him in his triumph and in his judgment of the world! But you, men of sin, enemies of God, tremble, for behold the *Lion of the tribe of Judah* is coming to take vengeance on your crimes. Whilst you were upon

[1]Apoc. i. 7.

earth he was the Good Shepherd who called you, who went after you, who offered you his merits and the forgiveness of your sins; but you did not wish to own him, you renounced your Master and your God. Do you know him now? What think you now of his adorable Name, of his power, his greatness, and his majesty?

Meanwhile, Jesus, appointed by his Father Judge of the living and the dead, has taken his seat upon his throne of glory; the angels are around him, ready to execute his orders; the apostles are at his side; the martyrs, the confessors, the virgins, all the saints are in his presence in sweet contentment, and say to him with the most lively joy: *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and benediction.*[1] And the Savior answers them: "Be you also, O my elect, glorified for ever and ever; be blessed through all eternity! Fear not the opening of the book of life, for there is no stain in you; you have profited by my merits, and washed your robes in the blood of the Lamb."

Then turning to the wicked, he will say: "Sinners, enemies of my name and my gospel, reveal yourselves to every eye as you really are, vile slaves of passion; let your crimes be made manifest to the whole universe! I told you that, were your sins red as scarlet, I should no more remember them if you but repented of them; and you would not repent. I invited you to do penance and be converted to me, and you obstinately continued in the ways of iniquity. I told you that all sins forgiven by my ministers were forgiven by me,

[1]Apoc. v. 12.

but through pride and human respect you would not take advantage of so salutary a remedy. Let your sins be this day revealed to the whole world; you committed them in secret, let them now appear in the light of day."

Then addressing the angels and the just at his right hand, he will say to them: "Come and judge between me and my enemies. Behold the soul of that proud man, of that hypocrite who, under the guise of virtue, concealed from himself the wickedness of his conduct. Let all nations now be witnesses; let them see on one side all the graces which I lavished upon him, and on the other, all his malice and ingratitude. Look into the soul of that libertine and behold the filth with which he sullied it; see in the soul of that impious and sacrilegious man all the vile ingratitude of his acts and conduct. They have all despised remorse; they have braved the terror of my judgments; they have trampled on my blood. . . ." O how great will be the shame of these unfortunate people! How great their humiliation and despair!

If, anticipating that terrible day, God were to make manifest to all eyes, at this very moment, the real state of our conscience, and make us known as we are to all those who esteem us most; or if, at least, he sent one of his servants to us, as he sent Nathan to David, and that messenger of God, enlightened from on high, addressed us with that confidence which such certainty would give: "Behold what you have done, what you have said, on such a day at such an hour"—what confusion would be ours! And yet such shame would be nothing in comparison with that which we shall have

to undergo at the last day if we have the misfortune to die in mortal sin. For the Holy Scriptures teach us that on the great day of manifestation every one will know the truth.

O how many secret sins will then be revealed to all! How many false virtues will appear in their true colors, and overwhelm sinners with a shame which, though more insupportable than hell itself, they will be forced to endure; for on that day there will be no remedy for so great a misfortune. They will have to confess all, to assent to all; every sinner, while cursing his fate, will be obliged to proclaim aloud the justice of his sentence.

Then from every side will be heard these words, pronounced with happiness and joy by the good, but with rage and fury by the wicked: *Thou art just, O Lord; and thy judgment is right.*[1]

APPLICATION

In what state shall we be on that great day of the manifestation of consciences? Shall we be glorified with the good, or with the wicked shall we be covered with confusion? Let us often reflect that all our action will then be laid bare before the eyes of all men; that even our most secret sins will be known to every one. Woe to us if they have not been effaced by the Sacrament of Penance! Happy shall we be, on the contrary, if we have avoided sin, or if, after having committed it, we have obtained pardon and kept to the way of justice: for then we shall be admitted to par-

[1] Ps. cxviii. 137.

ticipate in the glory of our Divine Head, and shall shine with his splendor before the eyes of the whole world. Let, then, the thought of the last day animate us to struggle courageously against such feelings as pride might excite within us.

Why should we seek glory here; why should we flee from the humiliations that come from men? There is, in truth, only one glory worth seeking—that with which our Lord will surround his elect on the last day, and which they will enjoy forever. There is only one humiliation that should be feared; that which the wicked will then receive, and which they must continue to endure forever in the abyss of hell.

If we wish to share in the glory of the elect, and to escape the shame of the reprobate, we must faithfully discharge the duties incumbent upon us as Christians, as religious, and as teachers; so that, on that great day, the exact conformity of our conduct to the laws that govern us may be manifest to all.

PRAYER

It would be impossible for me, O my God, to survive the shame that I should experience didst thou expose to the view of those with whom I live all the sins of my life; my sins of thought, word, deed, and omission; my sins against thy commandments, and the duties of my state; my sins against thee, against my neighbor and against myself. . . . And yet I must expect a still more painful revelation unless by a good confession, by true contrition and sincere repentance, I merit by thy goodness to have them forever blotted out.

I come, then, O my Divine Redeemer, conjuring thee to give me a heartfelt sorrow for having offended thee, and a firm resolution to amend my life; so that the many sins which I have committed may be forever effaced from thy memory. I ask thee this grace, through the intercession of Mary, the assured refuge of all penitent sinners, through whom I hope to obtain mercy.

Résumé, page 179.

When all men shall be assembled, awaiting the Sovereign Judge, the manifestation of conscience will take place.

1. All men shall see unveiled the conscience of each.
2. What shame for the sensual! What confusion for the proud! What exposure for hypocrites!
3. On the contrary, what glory for the just, for the pure of heart, for the friends of Jesus Christ!
4. O the folly of exposing ourselves to the supreme humiliation which shall then be the lot of the wicked!
5. O the wisdom of so acting as to have on that day a pure or a purified conscience!

—Let us, then, be wise in time:

1. Let us think often of that manifestation of conscience.
2. Let us confess our sins with sincerity and contrition.
3. Let us really do penance for them.
4. Let us avoid with care even the slightest faults.
5. Let us acquit ourselves faithfully of our duties now so that on that great day our conduct may be seen to have conformed exactly to the law of God.

THIRTY-SECOND MEDITATION

THE TWO SENTENCES

Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you. . . . Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.—Matt. xxv. 34, 41.

CONSIDERATION

Let us, in imagination, enter one of those courts where human justice is administered. Let us picture to ourselves the jury, after hearing all the witnesses, retiring to prepare the verdict which is to decide the fate of the prisoner. Let us afterwards see them return with all the solemnity that these proceedings require. A profound silence follows their entry into court; every ear is attentive to hear the sentence; every one trembles as if it were to affect himself.

But if such is the anxiety of those who have nothing to fear, what must be the terror of the unhappy criminal! In a moment more, and by a single word, his fate will be decided; he will be restored to liberty, if pronounced innocent; but if found guilty, shame and ignominy, hardship and suffering must be his lot: perhaps he may be called upon to pay the penalty with his life. What then must be the agitation of his mind? And yet, what is at stake? His liberty, of which he may be deprived by life-long imprisonment; or his life,

for the sentence of condemnation may anticipate the period of his death: but this premature death he may, if he will, make profitable to himself throughout eternity.

But who can conceive the anxiety of those who await the sentence of the Sovereign Judge? For the just are not merely to be restored to liberty or established in their good reputation before men, but to be placed in possession of an infinite happiness which nothing can disturb or diminish. And the wicked are not only to undergo punishment, or even meet death, for that must be met sooner or later by all men; but they are to be subjected to torments without limit in extent and duration; to endure an eternal death, or rather a life a thousand times worse than the most cruel death; a life passed forever in the most agonizing sufferings and the most overwhelming despair.

The sentences pronounced by men are not always irrevocable; for on earth there are times of pardon and favor. The sentence pronounced by Jesus Christ will stand forever, and will be carried out to its fullest extent. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of God shall not pass away; the elect shall be placed in a Paradise of pleasure and abide there for all eternity; the wicked shall be accursed and shall be hurled into hell, to remain there also for all eternity. The sentence pronounced upon them will be without appeal, without modification; its consequences will last forever; the worm of a guilty conscience will gnaw at their hearts forever; fire will devour them forever; all good will be far removed from them forever; and they will have no inheritance but tears, misery, and despair.

The sufferings to which criminals are condemned in

this world are not without such alleviation as may be afforded by words of consolation and encouragement, or at least by expressions of pity and compassion. But no such favor will be shown to those unfortunates who are condemned by the Sovereign Judge. For them grief, torments and despair will be without alleviation. To suffer punishments far beyond the power of human mind to conceive, to suffer from all the inmates of that dark prison-house, to suffer even from themselves,—such will be their fate for eternity.

The sentences passed by men are not always immediately executed; those passed by Jesus Christ will be carried instantaneously into effect. But to understand the principal difference between the sentences of men and those of our Lord, let us meditate on the words of the latter: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*[1] That is to say: "Come, enter into possession of the Sovereign Good. You are blessed of my Father. While you were upon earth he poured forth his graces upon you, and you proved faithful to them; and now he gives you glory without measure, or rather he gives you himself, and makes you sharers of his power. Come, reign with me, and possess the kingdom which I have prepared for you, which I have conquered for you; come, enjoy that endless felicity which is the inheritance of my elect."

But as this blessing is full of consolation to the good, so does the other sentence terrify and overwhelm the wicked.

Depart from me, ye cursed;[2] depart from me, in

[1]Matt. xxv. 34. [2]Matt. xxv. 41.

whom is centred all the happiness of creatures; depart from your God, depart from light, from repose, from peace, from all happiness. You have invoked upon yourselves a curse which has penetrated your very bones as oil penetrates a garment. Go, then, to the abodes of evil, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil whom you have chosen for your master; go, endure the punishment which you have deserved."

Such are the sentences that will be pronounced on the day of judgment. Which of the two will determine our destiny? Will Christ says to us: *Come, ye blessed of my Father,* or *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire?*

Let us ask our works; they will answer us.

APPLICATION

St. John Climachus relates that a religious of little fervor, having fallen dangerously sick, was in a vision summoned before the tribunal of God, and saw there such terrible things that when he returned to himself he could do nothing but sigh and weep. Having recovered his health, he buried himself in a cave, where he remained day and night, with his eyes fixed on one object, always praying, weeping, and begging for mercy. After many years passed in the most austere penance, the religious seeing him about to expire, begged him to speak some words of edification to them. Summoning then all the strength left him, he cried out: *Never would man sin if he knew what awaits him at judgment,* and with these words upon his lips he expired, leaving all his brethren in great fear and terror.

Let us reflect that the day will come when judgment will be for us no longer a mere subject for the exercise of imagination, but a fact, a reality, to be followed by eternal happiness if we are among the number of the elect, but by everlasting misery, without any mixture of good, without any consolation, without any hope, if we have the misfortune to die in mortal sin.

Let us, then, not force our Lord to pronounce sentence of malediction upon us, but rather give him the happiness of numbering us among his friends. Let us faithfully keep the law by which we shall be judged; that is to say, let us conform our conduct to the precepts of the Gospel, and let us strictly observe our rules; let us expiate our sins by penance, and never more commit them. Let us love Jesus Christ with all our heart and with all our strength; let us seek only to please him, and execute his wishes; let us be zealous in making him known, loved, and served; let us devote ourselves to him in the person of our neighbor, who represents him in our regard. We shall thus deserve to have that sentence pronounced upon us which will entitle us to go and reign with him in that kingdom where all is peace and joy and happiness.

PRAYER

O Jesus, who art all my hope, I entreat thee take pity on me. My soul is penetrated with the fear of thy judgments, and it finds confidence only in the thought that thou didst become man and die upon the cross to secure for me a favorable sentence. I hope that in thy goodness, O my divine Redeemer, after having

made me pass through the fire of tribulation, thou wilt call me with the blessed of thy Father to that place of rest and light wherein all my desires will be consummated. This I ask of thee through the intercession of the ever Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the saints, whose happiness I ardently desire to share. Amen.

Résumé, page 179.

Men are placed on the right and on the left of the Judge.

He is about to pronounce the sentence which shall determine their lot.

1. The sentence of benediction, calling to infinite happiness.

2. The sentence of malediction, condemning to infinite misery.

3. Jesus Christ shall say to the good: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you."

4. He shall say to the wicked: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

5. Which of these two sentences will he pronounce on us? Let us interrogate our works.

—Let us reflect that we ought:

1. To keep faithfully the law of Jesus Christ.

2. To expiate our sins by sincere penance.

3. To attach ourselves to Jesus Christ by true charity.

4. To seek only to please him.

5. To devote ourselves to his service and that of our neighbor, his representative in our regard.

THIRTY-THIRD MEDITATION

THE LAST FAREWELL

No brother can redeem, nor shall man redeem.—Ps. xlviii. 8.

CONSIDERATION

Jesus Christ having, if we may so express it, given the nations assembled before him sufficient time to recognize one another, and read the secrets of one another's souls, will with great majesty seat himself upon his throne of glory, and looking around upon the multitude, will show them his cross, the pledge of his love for men, his divine wounds, by which they were redeemed, his holy law, which ought to have been their rule of conduct, and the means of salvation which he had placed at their disposal. He will remind each one of his particular duties, according to the state which he had embraced; and the religious in particular he will remind of the holy rules which they had promised to keep, and the graces which they had received to facilitate the accomplishment of their duty.

To all he will show their obligations, and the helps given to fulfil them. Then great silence will fall upon that vast multitude, and turning towards the good with an air of sweetness, tenderness, and love that will fill them with consolation and happiness, the Sovereign Judge will say to them: "Come, you whom the world

rejected, whom it thought unworthy of its favors; yea, whom it regarded as the dust beneath its feet, but whom I find worthy of admission to the kingdom of heaven. Like me you have suffered, like me will you triumph. You have been associated in my humiliations, you will share in my glory. You have followed me to Calvary, you will now follow me to heaven. *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*[1]

Then turning to the wicked at his left hand, he will utter these terrible words: *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.*[2] "Depart from me, you who have insulted my cross and my humiliations, who have ridiculed the truths which I made known to you, who have so often despised my promises, my threats, and my graces. Depart from me, you who were ashamed of my passion; who wanted courage to espouse my cause; and who, through a cowardly human respect, neglected the most sacred duties of religion. By your crimes you have destroyed the image of my father in your souls; you have sullied your bodies, which should have been the temples of the Holy Ghost; you have abused my graces and all the means of salvation provided for you. You would not recognize me as your God, your Model, your Savior, and I cannot now regard you as my disciples and my children.

"During life you placed between yourselves and me a wall of division which my graces failed to break down; now, in my turn, I will place between us an immense abyss which with all your efforts you will never be able to cross. After having been exalted, ad-

[1]Matt. xxv. 34. [2]Matt. xxv. 41.

mired, and idolized by the world, behold, curses are now heaped upon you. Depart from me, for you are accursed; accursed by me, accursed by the angels and saints, accursed by yourselves! For you there is now only an angry God, a God of vengeance. For you there is now no hope, no help, no end or diminution to your sufferings. Go into that everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. You have imitated their rebellion, you shall be their inseparable companions in suffering. Begone into everlasting fire!"

After these two sentences have been solemnly pronounced, the elect will slowly ascend with Jesus Christ, while the reprobate will be obliged, in spite of themselves, to behold them and realize how great is their own loss. O misery! they will indeed get a glimpse of heaven and its glory, but they shall have only hell awaiting them; they will feel an intense longing to possess God, and yet they shall be separated from him forever.

They will then seek to implore the divine mercy, but prayer shall no longer be possible to them. They will try to address Mary, the refuge of sinners, but their sinful lips shall refuse to pronounce that holy name.

Then will the words of the Book of Wisdom be fulfilled; for the wicked, seized with trouble and fear and torn with anguish, will exclaim: *These are they whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints. . . . What hath pride profited us; or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought*

us? All those things are passed away like a shadow. For the hope of the wicked is . . . as smoke which is blown away with the wind.[1] Then the son, seeing his father, and the father his son, the daughter seeing her mother, the friend seeing his friend ascend to heaven, will ask for help and protection; but they will be answered that for them there is no longer father, mother, son, or friend.

Then these miserable creatures will cry out in rage and despair: "Farewell, beautiful heaven, which we shall never see! Farewell, happiness, for which we were created, but which we shall never possess; for we have lost thee through our own fault! Farewell, friends and relatives, farewell forever! You have imitated Jesus Christ, you have borne the cross, you have lived as saints; and we, fools that we were, have walked in the broad way, we have despised the counsels and example of our divine Master. We are lost, while you are saved. To you, then, be glory, while for us, alas! there remain only torments."

Suddenly, like an inert mass, these wretched creatures shall be precipitated into the abyss of hell. The angel of God will then come to place the seal of eternity upon the gates of that fearful prison-house, which shall never, never again be opened!

APPLICATION

Let us reflect seriously that we must one day take part in that judgment. Will the great and omnipotent God then be to us a kind Father coming to meet his

[1] Wisd. v. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 15.

children, or a stern Judge pronouncing sentence of condemnation on his enemies? Shall we hear from his lips words of blessing or of malediction? Shall we ascend with him to everlasting glory, or shall we be plunged with the devils in the inextinguishable flames of hell?

Let these thoughts penetrate our souls, and awaken at once both confidence and fear. Let us often dwell upon them, above all when we are tempted to sin. Let us seriously ask ourselves what we shall wish to have done at the moment when the sentence will be pronounced that must determine our fate for eternity. Let us think of it when tempted to offend God, or to relax our fervor in the practice of our religious duties; let us remember that the sentence must be one either of infinite happiness or of infinite misery!

PRAYER

Penetrate me, O my God, with so salutary a fear of thy judgment that I may dispose myself to prevent the rigor of thy justice. Inspire me not with a merely human fear, but with a Christian and supernatural fear; not with a servile and barren fear, but with a fear that is both filial and efficacious. Let me fear thee, O Lord, but let me also love thee.

Yes, may I fear to do anything that might displease thee, and may I long to do and suffer everything that is conformed to thy will! May I so fear and love thee that in place of the sentence of condemnation which I have so often merited, I may hear the consoling words that will admit me with the just to the

possession of that kingdom which thou hast prepared for them from the foundation of the world!

Résumé, page 180.

The sentence is pronounced: the just and the wicked must part, and part forever!

1. The just ascend in glory with Jesus Christ.

2. The wicked behold their departure.

3. What desolation they then experience! What despairing cries they utter!

4. Here a son sees his father ascending to heaven, and bids him farewell! There a father and a mother behold their child going up to heaven, and they bid him farewell!

5. Suddenly the damned are cast into hell!

—Let us reflect that we shall be present at the last farewell.

1. What sentence shall then have been pronounced on us?

2. Shall we ascend with Jesus Christ?

3. Shall we be cast into the abyss of woe?

4. Shall we bid an eternal farewell to the wicked in sentiments of gratitude to the God who has saved us?

5. Or shall we bid God farewell in accents of sorrow and with tears of despair? Let our conduct answer.

THIRTY-FOURTH MEDITATION

THE REALITY OF HELL

The rich man also died; and he was buried in hell.—Luke xvi. 22.

CONSIDERATION

There is a hell, there is a place of frightful torments, to which all those are condemned who die in the state of mortal sin. Faith teaches us this truth, and reason itself compels us to believe it. For since there is a God, and since this God is neither feared nor loved by some men; since he is even outraged by many; it is just and necessary that he inflict on them a punishment proportionate to the grievousness of their sin as a formal disobedience to his orders, a revolt against his supreme authority, and a treasonable outrage to his infinite majesty.

Moreover, is it just that the future lot of the wicked be the same as that of the good? Is it just that he who denied the existence of God, or who constantly forgot, offended, and outraged him, be treated after death like him who was always faithful to God's service, always most submissive to his orders, or who at least, after having offended him, humbled himself, confessed his sin, and did penance? Is it just that he who during life blasphemed God's holy name, and never

asked forgiveness for his sin, be treated like him who always pronounced it with respect and love? Is it just that he who refused to believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior of men, be treated like him who received his Gospel with docility and gratitude? Is it just that he who despised Christ's teaching and example be treated like him who strove to become his faithful disciple? By no means! The sinful man and the virtuous man cannot be placed on the same footing; there must be an immense difference in their future state; and therefore, while there is a heaven for the good, there must be a hell for the wicked!

Libertines who dare say in their corrupted hearts, *There is no God,*[1] and who say it only because they fear his power and his justice, may perhaps, also, for the same reason, affirm that there is no hell; but as the first blasphemy does not disprove the existence of God, so does the second fail to disprove the existence of hell. In vain do they deny this place of eternal torments; for they will thereby neither destroy its existence, nor save themselves from one day experiencing the terrible severity of its flames.

Let impious, wretched unbelievers say, with a foolish and misplaced raillery, that they would like to be assured by some one from the other world that there is a hell. But we might ask them: "Has any one ever returned to assure you that there is not hell?" He who best knows what exists in the other world is God, and it is God himself who has revealed to us the existence of hell. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, has said: *The rich man also died: and he was buried in hell.*[2] *Fear*

[1]Ps. lii. 1. [2]Luke xvi. 22.

him that can destroy both soul and body in hell;[1] there *their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished.*[2] Nothing, then, can justify the wicked in their persistent denial, which, moreover, is opposed to universal belief.

Yes, there is a hell; there is a place of torments prepared for the devil and his angels, and also for their imitators; a dreadful prison, whose walls of bronze are reddened by a fire that will never be extinguished; an abyss where nothing is seen but fire, nothing breathed but fire, nothing experienced but fire! This is the *pool of fire and brimstone,*[3] spoken of in the Apocalypse; this is the place described by holy Job as *a land of misery and darkness, where the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth.*[4]

Let us, who believe firmly the existence of hell and the reality of the sufferings endured there, look upon its fires as the most terrible instrument of vengeance created by a despised and outraged God. There he will one day shut up all his enemies, to punish them according to their works and the rigor of his justice; there he will withhold all manifestation of his love from men whom he made to his own image and likeness, but who, far from seeking to know, love, and serve him, had ignored and disobeyed him: there in his justice he will so appear to the ingrates who have despised his graces, his blessings, and his promises, that they may each exclaim with Job: *Thou art changed to be cruel toward me, and in the hardness of thy hand thou art against me. Thou hast lifted me up, and set me*

[1]Matt. x. 28. [2]Mark ix. 43. [3]Apoc. xx. 9. [4]Job x. 22.

as it were upon the wind; and thou hast mightily dasheil me.[1]

God, indeed, rewards as God, but he also punishes as a God who is omnipotent and eternal: as an omnipotent God, by inflicting the greatest torments upon the sinner; as an eternal God, by inflicting those torments forever.

"How terrible are these reflections!" exclaims St. Augustine. "My brethren," adds this holy doctor, "if I make you tremble by speaking thus to you, I myself have been the first to tremble. I do not pretend to inspire in you any other fear than what I experienced myself. I would try, on the contrary, to reassure you, could I myself feel some assurance; but I own I fear hell; I fear that place of punishment; I fear it, and I tremble at the very thought of it."

APPLICATION

Even if in place of being certain, the existence of hell were only probable, it would still be reasonable that we should do all in our power to avoid its torments and to practise virtue at whatever cost. For it is thus that men act in other matters; they take the safest course. If, for instance, a hundred persons were to assure me that a certain road is infested by robbers or wild beasts, or that a certain drink is poisoned, and but one or two men assure me of the contrary, would I, therefore, reject the testimony of the former, and be guided by the latter? Certainly not; if wise,

[1]Job xxx. 21, 22.

I would not go by that road, I would not taste of that drink, but I would adopt the safer course.

Why should we not act with the equal prudence in questions that regard the next world? Some wicked men, whose interest it is to deceive us, deny the existence of hell; but in opposition to their statement we find the general belief of mankind, the teaching of the Church, the words of Jesus Christ, the precise texts of Holy Scripture. To give credit, under these circumstances, to the denials of the wicked, and thus take the sure road to hell, would be the worst possible choice we could make; it would be inconceivable folly.

But, thank God, we have faith, and believe that there is a hell; and yet, how does it happen that we expose ourselves to the danger of falling into it? Should this danger one day be realized, our folly would be equal to theirs who deny its existence; we would act like him who, finding himself on the brink of a frightful precipice, would be senseless enough to insult the only person that could save him from falling.

No! no! let us never commit sin, for we would then become objects of God's vengeance. Let us not be such enemies to ourselves as to plunge headlong into those frightful abysses from which nothing ever rises save cries of agony and despair.

Let us inspire our pupils with the fear of hell. Let us be zealous in helping them to avoid its pains. Ah! if we love them, let us prove it by our care to preserve them from sin and its occasions, and to save them from ever falling into that bottomless pit, out of which there is no redemption.

PRAYER

O God of justice, who art also God of mercy and goodness, who dost threaten us with thy anger to prevent us from experiencing its effects, pierce our hearts with terror of thy judgments, and make us understand what it is to become the object of thy vengeance.

O Jesus, could it be possible that after having so frequently experienced thy goodness, thy care and solicitude, I should one day be rejected by thee, and condemned to everlasting punishment!

No! no! my adorable Savior, this misfortune shall never be mine; I trust in thy grace, to which I am firmly resolved to correspond; I have confidence in thy love, whose salutary favors thou wilt still continue to me; and I place my trust in Mary, my good and gentle Mother, whose faithful servant I wish to be, and who, I feel assured, will never suffer me to perish.

Résumé, page 180.

There is a hell.

1. God is just; he cannot treat in the same way those who die in his grace and those who die in enmity with him.

2. Jesus Christ teaches, in the most formal manner, the existence of hell.

3. The holy Scriptures contain a multitude of texts which instruct us in this truth.

4. The people of all times and of all countries have believed in hell.

5. Reason unites with religion and the authority of men in proclaiming this dogma.

What folly, then, what blindness in those who dare to deny that there is a hell!

—As to us, who are convinced of its existence,

1. Let us reanimate our sentiments of faith on this subject.
2. Let us meditate seriously on hell.
3. Let us fear it supremely.
4. Let us take every means of avoiding it.
5. Let us be zealous to make our pupils avoid it.

THIRTY-FIFTH MEDITATION

THE TORMENTS OF HELL

I am tormented in this flame.—Luke xvi. 24.

CONSIDERATION

The greatest afflictions, the severest hardships, the most unheard of sufferings that can befall us in this world are never without some alleviation, without some subject for consolation, without some occasional relief. They do not come all at once upon the same individual; they do not always afflict body and soul at the same time; they do not leave us without some hope of a better future; or if they are to be life-long, then the idea of death is not without consolation to the mind, and the hope of another and happier life makes us look upon our sufferings here as a source of blessings and as the foundation of endless happiness in heaven. Thus it is that no sufferings of this life can ever constitute an absolute and unalloyed evil. But it is not so in eternity: the damned will endure the most intolerable sufferings without any alleviation for the present or hope for the future; they will endure them all at the same instant; they will suffer both in soul and body; they will have no consolation, not even the power of turning their thoughts aside one moment from the evils that weigh so heavily upon them.

"There," says the author of the "Imitation,"[1] the slothful will be pricked with burning goads, the gluttonous tormented with extreme hunger and thirst; there the luxurious and the lovers of pleasure will have burning pitch and fetid sulphur rained upon them; and the envious, like rabid dogs, will howl for grief. There will be no vice but will have its own peculiar torment. There the proud will be filled with all confusion, and the avaricious pinched with the most miserable want."

There will be put in execution those terrible threats written in the Sacred Books against the enemies of God. *As much as she hath glorified herself, and hath been in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give unto her.*[2] *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*[3] *The vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms.*[4] The sinner *shall gnash with his teeth and pine away; the desire of the wicked shall perish.*[5]

All sufferings will be found in this frightful abode, which is reserved for the enemies of God: hunger the most gnawing, thirst the most burning, cold the most intense, heat the most intolerable, fire the most active, grief the most bitter, shame the most overwhelming, sufferings the most cruel, agony of soul the most excruciating, all these will be found there at once, without any mixture of good, without any hope or consolation. Ah! how terrified we should be while meditating on the torments of hell; on that fire which will never be extinguished, that fire which will burn both

[1]Bk. I. Chap. xxiv. 3, 4. [2]Apoc. xviii. 7. [3]Heb. x. 31.
[4]Eccl. vii. 19. [5]Ps. cxi. 10.

soul and body without destroying or consuming them, that fire which, as St. Augustine says, "will rage with fury against all the senses and all the faculties of the soul, in proportion to the extent of their participation in sin!"

O what a difference between that fire and ours, between the reality and the shadow! Ours is quickly consumed; that of hell, though infinitely more intense, burns forever, and is never diminished. Ours gives light, that of hell produces only a sombre glare, more frightful than darkness itself. Ours causes only one kind of suffering; that of hell causes all kinds of suffering at once. Our fire is an effect of God's bounty, that of hell is the instrument of his vengeance.

Who is the man, however ambitious he may be, who, to gain a kingdom, would consent to burn in a slow fire for a month, or even for a day? There is not one, nor could any one be found who possessed the use of reason. How inconceivable, then, is the folly of the wicked who, to gratify their miserable passions, consent to burn forever in the devouring flames of hell!

One's company in hell will be a new source of grief, sufferings, and despair. All the criminals that have ever been upon earth, and that have died in their sins, murderers, robbers, monsters of every kind, will be there assembled. In their rage they will tear one another, like angry dogs. The father will curse his son, the son will curse his father; the mother will curse her daughter, the daughter will curse her mother; friend, irritated against friend, will make him responsible for

his own miserable fate, and will call down upon him a thousand tortures.

What a hideous picture, what a frightful chaos will be presented by the frenzied madness, the cries of rage and the howlings of that vast multitude, with which myriads of devils will be associated! O God! what an assemblage! What a terrible fate!

And to these woes will be added an overwhelming despair, the ever present thought that all this can have no end, no diminution! Unceasingly will these desolating words of the damned ring in their ears: *"Forever! never!"* forever to suffer, forever to weep, forever to burn; forever! forever! Never to know what pity is! Never to see one ray of hope! Unceasingly will each repeat to himself: "I am damned, and damned forever! I suffer all possible evils, and I shall suffer them forever! God's arm weighs heavy upon me; on me he has heaped suffering in proportion to my guilt; and forever shall his arm crush me; forever shall this sea of fire inundate my soul, penetrate my senses, and burn my body!"

In vain will the damned call upon death and annihilation; their only answer will be these harrowing words: "Fire, grief, and despair must be yours for eternity; you *shall be tormented day and night, forever and ever.*[1]

In a word, no species of suffering, torment, and agony of soul will be wanting in that abode of horror; nor will there be any mixture of consolation, any the least hope of a future less gloomy and terrible!

[1]Apoc. xx. 10.

APPLICATION

Even to gain a throne we would not consent to pass an hour in that earthly fire which God created to supply our wants; and yet, we expose ourselves every day to the danger of being cast into the furnace heated by his anger, and to be cast in, not for one hour, but for eternity. And this we do, not to gain a throne, but for something far more contemptible: for a vile passion, for the pleasure of a moment, for the incense of praise and empty adulation. Is not such conduct almost inconceivable? Where is our faith? Where is our common sense? *Which of you,* says one of the prophets, *can dwell with devouring fire?*[1] Ah! when the devil, the world, and the flesh tempt us to sin, let us think that God addresses to us these words of the prophet; and before deliberating whether we shall consent to sin, let us ask ourselves whether we are willing to dwell for eternity in that fire kindled by God's anger, kept alive by his omnipotence, and applied by his infinite justice.

This was the method made use of by St. Martinian to triumph over temptation. Being solicited to commit a grievous crime, he kindled a fire, put his feet in it, and in the excess of his suffering, cried out: "If I cannot endure this weak fire at my feet for an instant, how could I endure that of hell, in my whole body and for all eternity?" To every fresh temptation he opposed this answer: "I dread the fire."

Like him, let us dread the fire; yes, let us dread the

[1]Isai. xxxiii. 14.

fire of hell, whose torments are beyond the power of language to express or even of imagination to picture.

PRAYER

Take pity on me, O my God, for I am penetrated with fear at the contemplation of the severity of thy justice, and with terror of heart I think of the misfortune of those who have died in mortal sin. Alas! were it not for thy infinite goodness and thy merciful patience, should I not long ago have shared their frightful fate? Should I not, like so many others, have been struck down by death, at a time when I was thy enemy?

Blessed be thou, O tender Father, who hast not ceased to wait for me, and who hast given me the grace of reconciliation. Help me to preserve that inestimable grace, that my soul may be adorned with it when I shall appear before thee, and that thus I may be admitted in heaven into the company of the penitent saints, where I may thank thee forever, for having preserved me from the endless remorse and the awful torments of hell.

Résumé, page 181.

Hell is the assemblage of all evils and the privation of all good.

1. There each crime has its particular torment.
2. There sorrow and despair reign supreme.
3. There is a devouring and unquenchable fire.
4. There all the wicked war upon one another. O God, what a society!

5. There the most cruel remorse devours hearts, there the gnawing worm never dies.

—How can we think of these things and not be

1. Seized with terror?

2. Eager to implore the divine mercy, begging our Lord to take pity on us?

3. Resolved to sacrifice all in order to avoid hell?

4. Penetrated with horror of mortal sin, which opens this abyss?

5. Animated with the greatest zeal to induce our pupils to fly from sin, and thus to avoid everlasting fire?

THIRTY-SIXTH MEDITATION

THE HELL OF THE SOUL

Fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell.—Matt. x. 28.

CONSIDERATION

During life the sinner seems to think it a small matter to lose God, he seems to believe that even after death he will easily be content not to see, love, and possess him; but oh! how cruelly will he be undeceived on the day of his death! For when the soul has been separated from the body, it finds itself in new and very different circumstances; it has ceased to have relations with the material world which heretofore occupied its thoughts and diverted them from God, and it acquires such a knowledge of his perfections, his sovereign goodness and infinite beauty, that it is moved by a desire to see and possess him, so strong, so ardent, and so vehement that nothing less can satisfy it. Then does it understand that being created for God, who alone is its end, its life, its all, no suffering can equal that of being separated from him.

But if it is in the state of mortal sin, it sees clearly that it is absolutely unworthy of being united to the Supreme Good; that consequently it can never possess him; and this thought brings with it a weight of mis-

ery beyond the power of language or of imagination to picture; it inflicts upon the soul suffering far more intolerable than that caused by the flames that devour it.

Impelled by its desire to see God, it struggles to rise above the flames of hell, till the thought of his holiness and its own guilt plunges it again into the fiery abyss. Again, impelled by the same desire, it moves upwards, but in vain; never can it behold that God so good, so beautiful, so worthy of love, for whom it was created, but by whom it has been rejected forever. This separation is to it a subject of the most profound grief, the most poignant despair. Always longing to possess God, and never able to attain him; consumed with longing that is as insatiable as it is unending! O wretched fate! O unspeakable misery of the unfortunate soul in hell!

All the powers of that miserable soul seem concentrated upon the work of torturing it; memory unceasingly recalls to it the end for which it was created, the graces, the helps without number which it received to gain that end, and the abuse which it made of all these means of salvation. "Ah! had I but wished," it exclaims, "I need not have been in this place of torments! If on such a day, at such an hour, I had heeded the charitable voice that called me to God, and the stings of conscience that admonished me to repent, to confess my sins, and shun in future that occasion of sin; had I corresponded to the abundant graces that were always urging me to a life of virtue, I should not be where I now am. But, alas! I rejected all. I might

have been happy, infinitely happy, and now my inheritance is endless misery!"

The understanding gives that unhappy soul a true knowledge of heaven and of hell, of all that it is, and all that it might have been had it consented to do the will of God; and the thought of all this is in itself a torture too horrible to be conceived. Ah! who can imagine the agony of a damned soul when it thinks of the unutterable happiness which it has lost, and the numberless and fearful sufferings that must be its fate forever? It thinks of the little effort once requisite to secure its salvation; of the little that God asked of it, of the nothingness of the goods and honors of the world which it preferred to the only real blessings, the only ones capable of satisfying man; and with a feeling of the most bitter and poignant regret, it exclaims: "Alas! for how little have I thrown myself away! Oh! how blind, how foolish I have been!"

The unfortunate soul is naturally and irresistibly impelled to quit that place of torments, and soar to heaven; but because of the weight of its iniquities, and because of its being forever confirmed in evil, it must remain far from God, a prey to his vengeance. This absolute necessity of always wishing without ever being able to accomplish its wishes causes in that wretched soul an ebb and flow of anger, rage, and despair, which no human tongue can describe, no created understanding can comprehend. And this torment, like all the other torments of the damned, will last for ages and ages, never changing, never diminishing through eternity.

The unhappy soul calls upon death, but it knows that

it was created never to die; fain would it wish to possess God, yet it remains forever fixed in its prison, desirous of ascending to him, yet powerless to do so; longing to behold him, yet knowing that its wish can never be accomplished. Oh! what an endless source of misery is comprised in this!

Conscience, too, is devoured meanwhile by unceasing remorse! "It is by my own fault," says the unhappy soul, "that I suffer, and shall suffer forever; it was my own free choice; I might have gone to heaven, and I preferred to go to hell! Neither grace, nor salutary counsel, nor good example was wanting to me; I had all I needed, but, alas! I proved false to my own true interests."

O how hard it must be thus to feel and confess an irreparable wrong! To be pitied in misfortune, or even to feel that the misfortune was inevitable, is always a comfort; but to be cursed, and to curse oneself as the guilty author of one's sufferings, is overwhelming in its terror. This indeed is the worm that dieth not, the worm that will forever gnaw at the heart of the reprobate.

APPLICATION

Do we wish that, after death, our souls should not be consigned to torture the very thought of which makes our blood run cold? Let us, then, take care to keep them free from sin, and to adorn them with virtues worthy of our holy state.

We shall keep our souls unblemished if we watch over our senses; if we mortify them; if we recite our

prayers with attention; if we draw from the sacraments all the fruits which they ought to produce, and if we acquit ourselves with exactitude and from motives of faith, of the obligations of our holy calling.

The faculties of our soul will not be a source of torment for eternity, if in this world we sanctify them by applying them to such things as can benefit us; if, for example, we make use of our memory to recall God's goodness to us, and his salutary lessons; of our understanding to comprehend our duties to God, our neighbor, and ourselves; of our will to resist with energy every temptation; and of our conscience to check our first steps on the road to destruction. Not only will these faculties then cause no torment to the soul, but each of them will afford it ineffable consolations in heaven, where God himself will be its reward.

Ah! if as often as the soul were oppressed with or weighed down by discouragement, our memory would present to its contemplation the thought of an eternity of happiness or misery, what strength should we not feel to fight bravely the enemies of our salvation! With what energy would we labor to secure infinite happiness, and to escape the frightful sufferings of the soul that has lost its God!

PRAYER

O God, who art infinitely merciful to the soul that sincerely seeks thee and chooses thee for its inheritance, behold me humbly prostrate at thy feet, begging thee to cast one glance of pity on my poor soul which trembles at the thought of thy justice, and wishes to

sever every tie that binds it to this earth. It comes to thee, impelled by a strong desire to accomplish thy adorable will in all things, and thus attain the happiness of being forever united to thee.

Deign, I conjure thee, to satisfy this desire: unite me to thee, henceforth and forever. If ever the senses should wish to tyrannize over my soul, come to my assistance, or rather do thou fight for me, remembering that I am thy property and belong entirely to thee. I now renew the offering which I have so often made to thee of my soul and its faculties. Oh! do not reject it because of my past inconstancy; and when, at the hour of death, my soul shall appear before thee, receive it into the bosom of thy loving mercy. I ask these favors through the intercession of the ever Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, whom the Church invokes as the Patrons of a happy death.

Résumé, page 181.

What torments can compare with those of the reprobate soul?

1. It feels the most absolute need of God. Charmed with his perfections, it naturally seeks him, and, unceasingly repulsed, falls back into the abyss.
2. It longs for heaven, and heaven is closed against it!
3. Hell fills it with horror, and there it must remain!
4. Its memory recalls its crimes; its understanding conceives the good which it has lost; its heart is a prey to cruel remorse.
5. And these torments are eternal!

Who, then, O my God, could think of these terrible truths and dare offend thee?

—As to us, who meditate on them, we will:

1. Keep thy holy law.

2. Fly sin and the occasions of sin.
3. Satisfy for those since which we have committed.
4. Never cease to implore thy mercy.
5. Proclaim the severity of thy justice, in order to fill with salutary fear the souls confided to us.

THIRTY-SEVENTH MEDITATION

THE HELL OF THE BODY

They were cast alive into the pool of fire burning with brimstone.—Apoc. xix. 30.

CONSIDERATION

The sinner makes use of his body, as well as his soul, to offend God; therefore God punishes both soul and body. It is true, the soul is more criminal than the body, because it consents to the sin and orders it to be committed; but the body participates also, in being the instrument of these sinful desires, and in seeking and finding pleasure in sin: it is therefore just that it share in the punishment of the soul; and that after the general judgment it be tormented in each of its senses.

Those eyes, which have so often brought death to the soul, will continually see through the lurid glare of the flames the indescribable horrors of that bottomless pit. They will see there the figures of the devils and the damned, spectres the most terrifying and repulsive that can be conceived. Those eyes that were sullied by impure glances will unceasingly pour forth burning tears, like liquid iron as it issues from the furnace.

The ears will have their own peculiar torment. Every one of the damned will hear, through all eter-

nity, fearful shrieks, frightful howlings, horrible blasphemies, from the millions of accursed who will be his companions in punishment, and many of whom will vomit forth fearful curses upon him. "Wretched children!" will the father and mother exclaim; "it is on your account that we are in the midst of these devouring flames; our curses be upon you!" "Woe to you," will they answer; "yes, a thousand times woe to you, ye unnatural parents, who have brought us into these frightful dungeons! It was the bad education that you gave us, it was your wicked example that caused our ruin." "Accursed friend!" will another exclaim; "it was you that corrupted me; you brought me into the paths of sin, that led to the abyss into which I am now plunged."

Thus will it be with all; and throwing themselves upon one another, they will tear one another like wild beasts. What language can describe how frightful and terrible will be the lamentations of the damned? How painful will be those soul-harrowing words which the sinner in hell will seem to hear throughout eternity: *"Forever, never!"* Forever to live and forever to suffer; never to receive consolation, never to feel hope!

The sense of smell will also have its own special torment; it will forever suffer from all that the imagination could conceive as polluted, corrupt, and insupportable. St. Bonaventure says that if the body of one of the damned was placed upon the earth it would spread pestilence over the whole world. What, then, must be the noisome odor arising from the bodies of all the damned together! And what a punishment must it be to breathe it forever!

The tongues of the damned will be like plates of red-hot iron, in punishment of all their impure or impious words; all their blasphemies against God and religion; all their calumnies and falsehoods against their neighbor!

The palate of the reprobate will be parched with burning and insupportable thirst; they will sigh unceasingly for one drop of water, and they shall never receive even that trifling relief!

Their hands will seek a support to enable them to rise above the flames, but they will grasp nothing but fire. Their feet will tread upon fire, they will find no ground to walk upon but the red-hot floor of their prison!

That body which served as an instrument of sin will not only be encompassed by the fire of hell, but it will, so to say, be changed into fire; just as coal cast into a burning furnace soon ceases to be distinguishable from the fire itself!

Moreover, though natural fire has the power of consuming and destroying everything, the fire of hell will have the fearful power of preserving while it burns. Hence the bodies of the damned will always burn with the same heat, always experience the same suffering, without being either destroyed or even altered in their properties; they will be like coals intensely heated, always burning and never diminishing. Oh! frightful, unimaginable suffering which the wicked must undergo in all its intensity and forever!

The blood of the damned will circulate through their veins like molten brass, and the marrow in their bones will boil like lead in a crucible. For the damned every-

thing will be fire; fire will jet from their eyes, from their ears, from their nostrils; while their very mouth will breathe forth flames!

Nothing of which we can think equals the tortures to which their bodies will be subjected; toothache however painful, nervous complaints however acute, fracture of bones or laceration of flesh is nothing, absolutely nothing, in comparison with the sufferings of the damned!

One soul in hell suffers more in an hour than all the sufferings of the martyrs put together during the first three centuries of persecution; and yet, some of the martyrs had their bones broken on the rack; others were sawed in two; some were crushed under enormous weights; some were burned in heated furnaces, and others at a slow fire! Yes, the picture of all that they endured makes us shudder, and yet all their torments united on one damned soul would not equal the hell which it suffers!

APPLICATION

Penetrated by the thought of hell, let us adore the justice of God and dread experiencing its rigors. Let us prevent this by giving ourselves up to a life of penance; for the more a man will flatter his flesh and spare it in this world, the more fuel is he gathering for the flames of hell.

Man will be chastised most severely in those things in which he shall have most sinned; every vice will find in hell its special torment; every sense will be punished according to its own nature, and according to its share in the commission of sin. This is a truth of

which we should never lose sight. If, then, we really wish to avoid this frightful punishment, let us mortify our eyes, let us keep guard over our tongue, let us watch over our senses lest they become instruments of sin; otherwise, we would be preparing them to become hereafter so many fire-brands in hell!

It is, above all, when we are tempted, when we feel inclined to commit sin, that we should recall the thought of hell, and ask ourselves whether it is reasonable to offend God, and thus expose ourselves for a moment's pleasure to an eternity of suffering.

Then it is we say to ourselves: "Could I dwell in that place of torments, in that fire kindled by the wrath of God? There are in hell souls that were consecrated to God in the religious state, perhaps in the very house in which I now live, and the cause of whose damnation is the kind of sin with which the devil now tempts me. Should I wish to share their torments after having imitated their crimes?"

PRAYER

O my God, how foolish I should be if I were to prepare for myself an eternity of punishment, through my unwillingness to accept a few moments' mortification, to endure some inconvenience for love of thee, to make some efforts to observe my rule faithfully, and lead a life worthy of a religious.

Henceforth, O my God, I shall in thought go down into the pool of fire and brimstone, and see the place which I have merited by my sins; and while contemplating it, I will mourn over the faults that made me

deserve such a fate. But I will not be satisfied with knowing my many grievous sins; I will try to expiate them by a penance based on hope and love.

Give me thy holy grace, O my God, that by it I may be established in justice and persevere therein; and thus avoid the torments reserved for sinners.

Résumé, page 182.

What torments of body the damned shall suffer!

1. Their eyes shall see only horrible objects.

2. Their ears shall hear only blasphemies, reproaches, maledictions, and cries of rage.

3. Their sense of smell shall be unceasingly affected by an insupportable stench; their taste, by all sorts of bitterness and a devouring thirst.

4. All their members shall be steeped in fire.

5. The fire which surrounds them, shall be likewise within them, penetrating even to the marrow of their bones, burning their entrails, and devouring their hearts.

—All this is frightful, and yet it is still far below the reality! Meditating thereon:

1. Let us adore the divine justice.

2. Let us excite in ourselves the fear of hell.

3. Let us ask ourselves if we have not deserved its torments.

4. Let us interrogate our works.

5. Let us abandon sin and do penance, in order that we may avoid these frightful torments.

THIRTY-EIGHTH MEDITATION

THE ETERNITY OF HELL

Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!—Matt. xxv. 41.

CONSIDERATION

The greatest evils, if of short duration, are often looked upon as insignificant; but less evils, if of long duration, are not infrequently considered great, sometimes even very great; so that if they were never to have an end, they might seem to be almost infinite. What, then, must we think of those fearful universal sufferings which are everlasting? Yet such are the sufferings of the damned.

Yes, their torments shall have no end, because God's mercy is shown in time, and for them *time will be no more;*[1] because *when the wicked man is dead, there shall be no hope any more;*[2] because out of hell there is no redemption, for there God's grace never enters; because the damned being confirmed in evil cannot return to God, cannot repent of their offences, and consequently must remain in sin, the true cause of their sufferings.

Their sufferings will never end. O how terrifying is that thought! As long as God shall be God, the damned shall be damned; the pit of fire into which

[1]Apoc. x. 6. [2]Prov. xi. 7.

they are cast shall last forever; the fire which devours them shall never be extinguished; their souls shall never die; even their bodies shall be immortal; and the demons that torment them shall be immortal too. Since, then, everything that contributes to their sufferings is everlasting, such also must their sufferings be.

Increase, if possible, the sufferings of the damned as much as you please, prolong their duration as far as the mind can reach, but take from them their eternity, and hell will no longer be hell; its inmates will no longer be damned; because they will no longer be a prey to despair. Take away, on the other hand, a great portion of the tortures of the damned, and leave to the remainder their eternity, hell will still exist for the reprobate. In spite of the diminution of their sufferings they will always be supremely miserable, for they know that their sufferings will never have an end.

Eternity enters into all the sufferings of the damned. Could they only believe that their misery would not be eternal, or could they for one moment forget that it will last forever, for that one moment they would not suffer hell.

To a damned soul eternity is like an immense globe under whose weight he is crushed; it touches him at only one point, but he feels the weight of the whole. "The damned," says Tertullian, "endure at every instant the weight of a whole eternity." The mind of every reprobate seems to conspire with the justice of God in adding to the torment. Every instant it keeps his future sufferings before him and thus makes them in a sense always present. Each of the lost suffers at

every moment all that he fears, he fears all that he foresees, and he foresees all the torments that he must endure throughout eternity. Yes, every instant he suffers the everlasting fire of hell, the eternal privation of God, all the horrors of a remorse that will gnaw at his heart forever.

Forever! never! What terrible ideas the words suggest when they refer to hell! Never to have any of the happiness for which man longs; forever to experience the sum of all the evils that it is possible to dread; forever to suffer, forever to despair: that is the state to which a damned soul is reduced; that is the eternity of hell. After as many millions of ages as there are grains of sand upon the sea-shore, and drops of water in the ocean, and atoms of oxygen in the air, a damned soul will be no farther advanced toward its goal than on the first day; it will have only begun its eternity.

Were one of the damned to shed a tear every thousand years, he would not see the end of his eternity when he had filled a vessel as large and deep as the ocean. Gird the whole world with ciphers, count them, reckoning a century as the unit, even then you will not have eternity. Let an angel reduce the earth to grains of dust as fine as those that dance in the sunbeams; if each were reckoned a thousand years, their sum will not give eternity.

Alas! ages will pass away, but hell will never pass away. Gladly would all the damned say to God: "O Lord, increase our sufferings, make them last as long as thou wilt, provided thou at last put an end to them." But no, they shall never have an end.

If the damned could only deceive themselves, saying

in their hearts that perhaps God would one day take pity on them, and either suffer them to die in those flames, or deliver them from their fury! But no! they are convinced of the contrary, and having his sentence of condemnation constantly before his eyes, each of them is forced to cry out: "All the suffering that I undergo, my anguish of soul and this devouring fire shall never end, never! no, never! I know it, I feel it. It is a fact; they must last forever."

O Forever! O Eternity! Eternity of hell, how dost thou inspire both fear and horror! And yet there are men who believe these truths and are lost. O folly! O madness, thus to work against their own true interests!

APPLICATION

"O Christians!" exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "whatever your state of life may be, think of the worm that never dies, of the fire that will never be extinguished, and you will no longer find your temptations insurmountable, or the commandments of God hard to keep."

To vanquish a temptation, to obey a commandment, one must do violence to himself; but this pain is nothing to what he would deserve if he neglected his duty.

Like St. Aloysius Gonzaga, let us often ask ourselves, particularly when harassed by difficulty, "What is this compared to eternity?" The least pain, if constant, makes us impatient and irritable; the sting of an insect, a constrained position, a trifling but uninterrupted pain is sufficient to annoy us. What then, must be the fire of hell, the despair of hell, all the

torments of hell united bearing down with all their weight upon one poor wretch forever?

Who, even to become a king, would consent to burn for one day? or to suffer the pricking of a thorn day and night for twenty years? Fools that we are, we consent to suffer for eternity torments infinitely worse than that, and for one moment's pleasure, for a slight and sometimes even a shameful gratification! Let us henceforth be wise; let us learn to appreciate things at their true value: temporal things as temporal; eternal things by the importance they derive from their eternity.

PRAYER

Suffer me, O Lord, whilst fearing the eternal chastisements inflicted upon sinners, to obtain from thy goodness, both mercy and pardon. Let me pay here all my debts to thy divine justice; but save me from those devouring flames that can never appease thy justice. I confess that a hundred and a thousand times I have deserved to be plunged therein.

But since thou hast spared me hitherto, complete thy work in me, continue to exercise upon me that ineffable mercy whose salutary effects I have so often experienced. I desire to reform all that displeases thee in my conduct, and to perform a penance proportionate to the number and grievousness of my offences. I will often go down in spirit into hell during life, that I may not go thither after death.

Grant, O my God, that the sacred fire of thy love

may be enkindled in my heart, and that it may burn with that fire through time and eternity.

Résumé, page 182.

The torments of the damned last forever:

1. Jesus has said to them: "Depart into everlasting fire."

2. The mercy of God is exercised in time; but for the damned time has ceased to exist.

3. To be delivered it would be necessary for them to repent of their sins by an effect of grace and through a motive of love; but in hell there is no grace, no love.

4. To suffer forever, and to have one's suffering constantly present to one's mind—what a fate!

5. Who can form an idea of it? Let us suppose as many ages as there are drops of water in the sea, grains of sands in the earth, or atoms in the entire universe; yet not all this will express what eternity is.

—O what folly to expose one's self to the fires of hell!

1. Let us fear those devouring flames.

2. Let us dread that everlasting prison.

3. Let us fear sin, which casts body and soul into it.

4. Let us fear tepidity, which leads to sin.

5. Let us fear God, whose justice is so terrible; and let us by our fidelity merit to experience only his mercy.

THIRTY-NINTH MEDITATION

SENTIMENTS WHICH THE THOUGHT OF HELL OUGHT TO PRODUCE

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.—Matt. viii. 12.

CONSIDERATION

Consider what kind of place that must be which is destined to punish such as have not only abused God's gifts, but also wished to live and die in their iniquities. To form an idea of this prison, go down in spirit into that abode of horror and suffering where all torments unite and display an activity infinitely beyond our power to imagine. Descend into the frightful abode of those immense furnaces kindled by God's anger. Such is hell!

But who can comprehend what it is? Who can form a just idea of that prison of fire prepared for the devil and his angels, in which such as have died enemies of God shall be forever confined?

Hell is a darksome prison, where nothing is seen but by the lurid light of the raging flames! It is an immense abyss, which seems scarce able to hold the many victims hurled into it, where, heaped one upon another, they shall be eternally sacrificed to the vengeance and justice of God, without experiencing either rest or even a diminution of punishment.

There the wicked, being confirmed in evil, shall cherish in their hearts no sentiments but those of hatred, rage, madness and despair. There, separated from him who is their last end, they shall have no power but that of suffering. Their memory will be unable to recall aught but what can torment them; their understanding will grasp nothing but the extent of their wretchedness; their will must unceasingly meet with contradiction, their senses will experience every kind of excruciating torture.

You whose only thought is to flatter your passions and build up a fortune in this world, draw near to that place of torment; look upon that pool of fire and brimstone into which all shall be cast who have forsaken the way of virtue to follow that of their corrupt inclinations. Reflect also that those torments are as frightful in their nature and intensity as they are endless in duration.

What folly will be yours, if for the enjoyment of forbidden pleasures, or through culpable indifference or base human respect, you will eventually be tormented there for ages and ages,—nay, for eternity! Now examine your conscience. If you discover therein any mortal sin, were it but one, reflect that you have deserved all these punishments, and that God could justly have inflicted them upon you now.

Be then grateful for his mercy to you, for not only has he refrained from casting you into hell and banishing you forever from his presence, but he has urged you to return to virtue, to do penance for your sins, to correspond to his graces, and thus merit heaven. O what goodness! what charity!

But perhaps, alas! far from profiting by his goodness and charity, you have again relapsed into the same sins; perhaps at this very moment, mortal sin dwells in your heart, and makes it worthy of hell. If such be your wretched state, if you are in danger of falling into that abyss of fire, act as one would who saw himself on the brink of a precipice at the foot of which wild beasts were waiting to devour him; or as one confined in a room surrounded by the flames of an immense conflagration. With what eagerness would he not stretch forth his hands to any one whom he thought able to save him! how humbly and earnestly would he not implore assistance!

And yet, were the body of this unfortunate man to be burned by fire, or devoured by starving wild beasts, such a fate would not, like damnation, be an infinite evil. But many there are who, the more reason they have to fear hell, look upon it with less dread and apprehension. Fools! they take precautions against everything that can afflict them in this world. If they are in danger of losing their fortune, they spare no pains to save it; if they suffer some bodily indisposition, they have recourse to a physician, take the remedies prescribed, however disagreeable, and submit if necessary to a most painful operation; all to gain a few days more of this miserable existence. But to save themselves from hell, to prevent the eternal ruin of their souls, they do nothing! They sleep when they should work; they go blindly forward, and perhaps with a smile upon their lips, plunge headlong into hell. Let us follow the advice of our Lord, who in his holy Gospel says to us: *Fear not those that kill the body,*

and cannot kill the soul; but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell.[1]

APPLICATION

Let us fear hell, but above all, let us fear sin which alone can merit such punishment. At the thought of the sufferings of the damned, of their undying remorse, of their overwhelming despair, of the fire that penetrates their being and forever torments them, let us be convinced of God's terrible justice, and let us be wise enough to avert its rigor. Let us understand how important it is to follow the advice of the author of the "Imitation:" "In all things look to thy end, and how thou shalt be able to stand before a severe Judge from whom nothing is hidden; who takes no bribes nor receives excuses, but will judge that which is just. . . . Why dost thou not provide for thyself against the day of judgment, when no man can be excused or defended by another, but every one shall have enough to do to answer for himself?"[2]

When the devil tempts us to sin, he removes from our minds all thought of hell; but let us recall it, and look upon it face to face. What command would we not have over ourselves if we were penetrated with this thought! With what courage would we not fight against temptations! With what energy would we not trample them under foot if we thought that after yielding to that evil pleasure, after committing that sin, perhaps even while committing it, we might be hurled into the abyss of fire of unending torments! Let

[1]Matt. x. 28. [2]Bk. I. Chap. xxiv. 1.

us acquire wisdom, and learn from the misfortunes of others. Let us not wait to experience hell before making our decision, for then, alas! it would be too late to change!

PRAYER

"O Lord," said the royal prophet, *"pierce thou my flesh with thy fear."*[1] It was because he understood, O God, the necessity of that salutary fear to repress our corrupt nature, and resist the seductive pleasures of the senses. O how absolutely necessary is this fear for me who am so weak, so beset by violent temptations! Of thee, therefore, do I now ask it. Yes, penetrate me with thy fear; fill me with dread of those frightful dungeons of hell which sin has dug beneath my feet, and from which thy mercy alone preserves me.

I know, O my dear Savior, that thou art powerful enough to preserve me, good enough never to abandon me. But because I am perpetually provoking thee by my offences, I have reason to dread thy divine justice. Alas! when I look upon the number of sins by which my life has been sullied, have I not reason to regard myself as no better than those now suffering in the frightful dungeons of hell? Come to my aid, O Lord, and save me. Grant that, avoiding sin and persevering in virtue, I may hereafter praise in heaven thy infinite mercy, which has saved me from hell.

Résumé, page 183.

Let us consider what hell is, and what torments are there endured.

[1] Ps. cxviii. 120.

1. It is the prison of God's enemies where all pains are united.

2. It is the fiery furnace kindled by his justice.

3. It is the home of the most absolute despair.

4. It is the abode of unending sorrow.

5. It is the city of tears, where only these words are heard: Woe! eternal woe!

—Let us, then, comprehend:

1. What regrets devour those miserable souls who, for a vile satisfaction, have exchanged heaven for hell!

2. How terrible is the justice of God!

3. What gratitude we owe him for not having struck us down when we were in mortal sin!

4. How we ought to fear and hate sin!

5. With what energy we must resist the temptations of the devil, who wishes to drag us with him into the abyss!

FORTIETH MEDITATION

EXISTENCE OF PURGATORY

He himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.—1 Cor. iii. 15.

CONSIDERATION

The existence of purgatory is as certain as that of hell; it is an unquestionable truth of our holy religion. The Church, assisted by the Holy Ghost, and supported by revelation, teaches us that, to enter heaven immediately after death, the soul must be free from the guilt of every sin, however small, from every stain of imperfection, and must besides, have fully satisfied divine justice for sins already forgiven. On the other hand, she teaches us that the soul which at the hour of death was in the state of mortal sin, even though guilty of but one mortal sin, is condemned to the punishments of hell.

But between these two states of perfect purity and of mortal sin, there is a middle state in which the soul, without being grievously guilty, is yet sullied in the eyes of God, because it either has committed venial sins that are not yet pardoned, or has not fully expiated the guilt of its mortal sins.

According to the teaching of the holy Fathers, the human race is intended to take the place of the mil-

lions of rebel angels who were cast out from heaven: there must then be a large number of persons who die in the state of sanctifying grace. But how many of them are perfectly pure? How many of them have paid their full debt to God's justice? The number is indeed small.

How many are there who, when dying, though free from mortal sin, have no faults with which to reproach themselves, no idle words, no indiscretions, no acts of impatience, no negligence in the discharge of duty, no distractions in prayer, etc? Is it not written: "A just man shall fall seven times?" How many also are there who at death have fully atoned for the sins that have been forgiven them?

It is, then, certain that very few souls are admitted into heaven immediately after their departure from this world. Now, what is the lot of the others? Heaven is closed to them, because nothing defiled can enter therein: hell is not to be their habitation, because they are not polluted by mortal sin. There must then be a place of expiation, intermediary between heaven and hell, wherein such souls will be purified of every stain, and will make complete satisfaction to divine justice.

God's justice and his mercy both necessarily suppose a purgatory; moreover the Sacred Books refer in several places to this abode of expiation. Our Lord himself alludes to it in the words: *Amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou pay the last farthing,*[1] and again in these: *He that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world, nor the world to come;*[2] for he

[1]Matt. v. 26. [2]Ibid. xii. 32.

thereby gives us to understand that some sins will be forgiven after death.

The doctrine of purgatory was professed even before the coming of Christ. Judas Machabeus prayed for his companions in arms who had died in battle, and offered up sacrifices of expiation for them. After mentioning this fact, the sacred author adds: *It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.*[1]

The Church, who is infallible in her doctrine, teaches that the existence of purgatory is a dogma of our faith, and is continually reminding us of this truth. Many outside the Church have believed in the existence of a place of temporary expiation, wherein souls are purified before entering into heaven. In fact, it is a belief that is almost universal among Christians, and it corresponds to a natural instinct of the heart.

Who among us has not had to mourn the death of persons dear to him? Could we always be certain that they died perfectly free from sin, and that therefore they were admitted immediately into heaven? And if not, could we accept the frightful supposition that they were damned, and consequently banish the very thought of them from our minds? No! no! we rather believed that they were detained for a time in a place of suffering, in which they were made worthy of the infinite happiness promised them, and from which our prayers, alms and mortifications, and above all the holy sacrifice of the Mass might hasten their release or at least diminish the severity of their sufferings.

Thus our idea of God's justice and goodness, the

[1] 2 Mach. xii. 46.

words of Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures, the teaching of the Church, the common sentiment of mankind, and reason itself proclaim the existence of purgatory.

APPLICATION

Let us consider in the light of faith that place of suffering wherein, by many torments, the faults which we so frequently commit and perhaps regard as trifles, are expiated. Let us, therefore, carefully avoid them. Let us cherish the resolution to keep ourselves pure in the eyes of God, that when he calls us to himself we may be admitted immediately to see him in his glory.

Let us enter courageously on the practice of penance; let us expiate our sins in this life, that they may not condemn us in the next. Let us never forget that there is no comparison between the sufferings of this world and those of purgatory. Let us profit by all the means of satisfaction that our holy state furnishes; let us always strive to diminish our debts to God.

Let us endure our purgatory here, by practising mortification and patiently submitting to the difficulties of our state of life, to the sicknesses and other trials which Providence may send us; and thus, by the grace of Jesus Christ, we shall become worthy of entering at the moment of death into the very happiness of heaven. For the same purpose, let us endeavor to gain as many indulgences as possible. Let us frequently draw from this treasure which to assist our weakness our good Mother has placed at our disposal. But let us not think of ourselves only; let us think

also of the souls in purgatory, and let us pray for them.

Let us teach our pupils this touching devotion, which is so calculated to develop in their hearts sentiments of charity and piety; which is so pleasing to the heart of Jesus, and so efficacious in consoling the poor souls who are its object, by shortening their sufferings, opening heaven to them, and thus making them our intercessors before God.

PRAYER

Yes, I believe, O my God, that thou hast appointed a place of expiation for those souls which, on leaving this world, are not sufficiently pure to be admitted at once into the courts of heaven. I believe also that, in that place of tears, their sufferings far exceed any ever experienced on earth. Yet at the same time I bless thy mercy while I fear thy justice. When the transgressions which I now consider trivial are seen by the light of the fires of purgatory, how deserving of the most bitter regret they will then appear to me!

I thank thee, O God of infinite goodness, for having taught me how careful I should be to efface from my soul every stain during the time of thy mercy, and how solicitous I should be to avoid everything that might in the least displease thee. I promise, with the assistance of thy grace, to repair the defects of my life, and from this moment so to live that I may justly hope to be received into thy arms, when I shall appear before thee.

Résumé, page 183.

The existence of purgatory is a fundamental truth.

1. Nothing defiled enters heaven; but hell is for those who die in the state of mortal sin. Now, how many persons die in the state of grace without being perfectly pure! There must, therefore, be a place where they are purified before being admitted into heaven.

2. Jesus Christ teaches it when he speaks of sins that are remitted after death.

3. The Old Testament establishes it in the Second Book of Machabees.

4. The infallible Church has made it a dogma of faith.

5. And outside of her communion, multitudes have believed in the existence of a temporary abode of expiation.

—Let us believe in purgatory, and consequently,

1. Let us avoid even the slightest venial sins.

2. Let us do sincere penance for the sins of our past life.

3. Let us endeavor to gain the indulgences of the Church.

4. Let us pray for the faithful departed.

5. Let us train our pupils in devotion to the souls in purgatory.

FORTY-FIRST MEDITATION

THE SUFFERINGS OF PURGATORY

Why hidest thou thy face, and thinkest me thy enemy?—Job xiii. 24.

CONSIDERATION

The most painful sickness, the most grievous disappointments, even the sum of the most cruel torments borne by all the martyrs, racks that dislocated and broke their bones, wheels studded with iron teeth that tore their flesh, fire that burned to their very bones and wild beasts that devoured them,—not all these together can be compared with the sufferings of the souls confined in purgatory, who in that darksome prison endure, with the exception of despair, all the torments of the damned.

The two principal sufferings of these holy souls are the pain of fire and the privation of the sight of God. And first of all the pain of fire. O how terrible is this avenging fire kindled by the justice of God! How excruciating is the suffering which it causes! Purgatory would be a sort of hell, did not the love of God and the certainty of one day possessing him, support the poor souls in their sufferings! No! we cannot imagine the pains of a soul plunged in fire, breathing nothing but fire, touching nothing but fire, buried in an

abyss of fire, without the power of leaving its prison or procuring any relief.

Who could endure even the mere thought of keeping his foot or his hand in a great fire for several days, or even for a few hours? Who could endure the thought of keeping therein not his hand only, but his whole body, supposing that, by a miracle of divine justice, he was kept for years without dying or even losing any of his sensibility? And yet, this fire is only a feeble image of that of purgatory. O how great, how terrible, how awful must be the sufferings of the souls that are confined in that prison!

Nevertheless, fire is not the greatest suffering of these holy souls; the privation of the sight of God is far more painful. While entombed in its miserable body, and in general basing its judgment only on the testimony of our senses, the soul in this life understands very imperfectly the nature of God, and its relations to him: and therefore the desire of seeing him and the pain of being separated from him make little impression upon it. Many persons even fall into so deplorable an error as to persuade themselves that if they could but enjoy the pleasures of this world they would be satisfied to live forever without seeing God. But as soon as the soul quits the body and all earthly things, it perceives that happiness is to be found only in the possession and love of God. To see Him is its most imperative want, and that separation from Him causes the greatest affliction.

O what are its emotions when it raises its eyes to the gate of the heavenly city, so long in opening to receive it? What sentiments fill and possess it when

it pictures to itself the magnificence of the New Jerusalem, the happiness of the Paradise to which it cannot yet be admitted: when it thinks of Mary, our good Mother, whom it loves so fondly, and from whom it is still separated; when it thinks of its Savior, who withholds it, until it has been perfectly purified, from the happiness of seeing his glory; when it thinks of the adorable Trinity for whom it knows that it was created, when it reflects on that Supreme Beauty which it most ardently longs to contemplate and possess, and which it cannot see, because it is still indebted to God's justice!

The yearning of a new-born child for the arms of its mother, the regrets of a monarch who has lost his throne through his own fault, the wretchedness of a suicide to whom life is nothing but misery, all these are nothing in comparison to the yearnings of the soul to see its God and to possess the Sovereign Good, the necessary object of all its affections.

O if we could conceive the anguish of love that the souls in purgatory suffer for the uncreated Beauty towards which they are impelled, and from which they are still withheld; we should behold them, with eyes bathed in tears, looking upwards through the devouring flames towards heaven, while sighs of grief, inflamed by ardent love, would break forth, moving us to the tenderest compassion.

It is now we understand, O Lord, that being created for thee alone we can find repose in none but thee. Thou art the centre of our affections, the sole object of our love; thou art all that our hearts desire. O when shall we be allowed to behold thee! When shall we enjoy thy adorable presence, which alone consti-

tutes our happiness? When shall the veil be removed that hides the Holy of holies from our eyes? O how we sigh for that happy moment! . . . *From the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord!*[1] O deign to hear our fervent prayers, and end this anguish of separation from thee, for we are languishing, we are dying from the desire to possess thee; *O God, show us thy face and we shall be saved.*[2]

APPLICATION

Let the thought of the inexpressible sufferings endured by the holy souls in purgatory move us to pray for them with all the fervor of which we are capable. Let us listen to their cry: "*Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends.*[3] You can help us, you can supplicate God's mercy in our behalf."

Let us give ear to their entreaties and come to their assistance. Let us not only pray for them ourselves, but get others to pray for their deliverance. Let us urge our fellow religious and our pupils to remember them. Let us neglect nothing to revive and strengthen this devotion. Let us gain in their behalf as many indulgences as possible.

Let us make it our serious care to avoid the sufferings that afflict them, by avoiding henceforth the smallest faults and doing all in our power to satisfy the justice of God for our past sins.

O how little we prize our own dearest interests, when to procure a moment's pleasure, to avoid a little trouble or a slight constraint, we commit multiplied and al-

[1]Ps. cxxix. 1. [2]Ibid. lxxix. 4. [3]Job xix. 21.

most daily faults which will cause us so much remorse in purgatory! How little faith we manifest when the dread of that devouring fire and the thought of seeing ourselves deprived of the vision of God, perhaps for years, perhaps for ages, make no impression upon us!

Sometimes we even shake off the thought of these sufferings, and carry our temerity so far as to make them a pretext for living in tepidity, for neglecting our duties, and for continuing in the habit of venial sin. We shall do penance, we say, in purgatory! Fools that we are! What we could here expiate by a tear, a slight mortification, a short prayer, we reserve for avenging fires and torments beyond the power of language to express. Where is our faith? where even is our reason? Let us reform our conduct in this respect, and, by a pure and penitential life, merit to be admitted immediately after death into the happiness of the saints.

PRAYER

O God of all holiness and all justice, make me understand how great are the sufferings of purgatory. Alas! while upon earth I do not realize how painful it is to be separated from thee; and yet this is really the greatest of all sufferings.

Grant, O my God, that I may come to understand this at least to some extent; that I may cherish greater pity for the sufferings of those souls that are still denied the beatific vision; and that I may do what I can to give them relief. Inspire me with a great fear of one day enduring the same chastisement, so that from this

day I may carefully avoid sin and do penance for all the faults I have had the misfortune to commit.

Résumé, page 184.

How great are the pains of purgatory!

1. They incomparably surpass all that we can suffer in this world.

2. The suffering souls are detained in a gloomy prison.

3. An ardent fire devours them.

4. What regrets do they not feel!

5. But of all their sorrows, the most painful is to be deprived of the sight of God, to be separated from that Supreme Beauty towards which they tend unceasingly.

—O how pitiable is their state!

1. Let us, then, have compassion on them.

2. Let us aid them by our prayers and good works.

3. Let us induce our fellow religious and our pupils to help them.

4. Let us gain all the indulgences we can in their behalf.

5. Let us dread the fires of purgatory, and endeavor to merit by a life of fervor, to be admitted into heaven immediately after death.

FORTY-SECOND MEDITATION

SUFFERINGS OF THE SOULS IN PURGATORY AT REMEMBRANCE OF THEIR FAULTS

The hand of the Lord has touched me.—Job xix. 21.

CONSIDERATION

Let us picture in imagination the solemn moment when the soul of the just man, on leaving his body, appears before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge. A wonderful transformation then takes place in it, says St. Ambrose: it is encompassed by the Divine Majesty; it sees everything in a new light; it experiences a complete change of view, thought, desire, and affection.

Understanding in a special manner how worthy God is of its love, and what happiness he procures for his elect, it feels an inconceivable longing for him and yearns for heaven in order to enjoy him and to share in his glory. But suddenly it is checked by an irresistible force, and hears these terrible words: "Depart, approach not; thou art not yet worthy of Paradise; first pass through the fires of purgatory."

Then forced to retire, and turning its gaze inward, the soul perceives all the faults of which it is guilty: it sees the stains not yet entirely effaced; it sees the graces and the inspirations which it neglected, the defects which it permitted in the discharge of its duties;

it sees its distractions in prayer; in a word, a multitude of imperfections of which it had never thought, but which now compel it to be purified by fire before entering heaven.

Who can describe or understand the suffering, the mortification, the agony of a soul when on its separation from the body it appears before God, in whom it recognizes its Father, Creator, Redeemer and Benefactor, its First Beginning and Last End, in whose possession it realizes that it can alone be happy, and yet knows that it cannot at once be united to him!

The sorrow of a loving child who, on returning to his father after a long absence, is repulsed at the very moment when he is about to throw himself into his arms, can give us but a very faint idea of the anguish of a soul that, because of its stains, cannot yet rest in God, the only object of its love. Then it realizes how great was its mistake when it reckoned as trifles unworthy of attention, idle words, want of mortification in the use of the senses, voluntary distractions in prayer, and negligence in the discharge of duty.

"O my God," it exclaims with the sincerest regret, "now indeed do I recognize my mistake. How deplorable those faults are which I then esteemed slight, but which now so painfully delay my happiness! Now O my God, I see, that being created for thee, I cannot live without thee; for thou art the centre of my affections; I love thee with all my heart, O infinite Beauty, and I long to be united to thee and possess thee."

It then seems to hear the just Judge answer: "It is too late now to give me proofs of thy love; thou oughtest to have done so by thy acts during the days of thy

pilgrimage upon earth; thou oughtest to have performed thy duties more exactly, corresponded more faithfully to my graces, and followed my inspirations with more docility. Thou shouldst have had more contrition for thy sins, and done more penance to satisfy for them; though oughtest to have been more generous in my service, avoiding inconvenience less, and making the slight sacrifices that I demanded. Thou oughtest to have taken more precautions against vanity, sensuality, dissipation; thou shouldst not have forgotten that even an idle word must be judged by me."

And if this soul be that of a religious, it will hear the thrice holy God add these words: "Thou hast committed many faults against thy rules; thou hast not labored carefully for thy perfection; thou hast not profited by the means to attain it; thou hast not drawn sufficient fruit from thy confessions and communions. By a generous correspondence to the special graces I gave thee, thou mightest have not only satisfied for thy sins, but enriched thyself with my merits. But thou hast acted differently, and therefore I say to thee depart into the fire of purgatory, whose sufferings thou mightest have escaped by a greater fidelity, and a more frequent use of the indulgences placed at thy disposal." O what torment must it be to the soul to hear these just reproaches addressed to it!

But let us behold it in purgatory, let us see it weeping and lamenting at the sight of the real character of its faults; faults which still detain it in raging flames, and form an inseparable barrier between it and the Paradise for which it longs; faults which are like hideous blemishes and which prevent it from ap-

proaching the abode of glory, into which nothing defiled can enter.

O what bitterness and regret it feels at such a sight! "I might have merited to see God," it cries, "to possess him at the moment of death, but because I did not watch over myself, because I neglected small things, because I did not perform all my actions as well as I might have done, I am now a captive in these scorching flames. O if I had only been more eager to gain the indulgences attached to my prayers and good works, of what great assistance would they now be to me!"

APPLICATION

Let us reflect on these truths when, for some satisfaction, or to escape a slight sacrifice, we are tempted to offend God, to neglect our duties, to disregard those inspirations of grace which incline us to a life of more perfect virtue and greater purity. When we yield to these temptations, what food for repentance are we not storing up! What fuel are we not amassing for the flames of purgatory! What wretched chains are we not forging to bind our hands and feet in that place of expiation and fearful suffering!

O how blind we are! We might prepare to go directly from this world to Paradise, and we consent to delay our happiness, to place between us and the heaven to which we aspire a lake of fire into which we shall be immersed perhaps for many years; where we shall experience the keenest regrets and suffer the most excruciating torments; where, at the sight of our faults,

we shall feel the deepest confusion and the bitterest remorse.

Let us then act with wisdom, and put no obstacle to our union with God; let us serve him with fervor and fidelity; let us discharge whatever debts we owe to his justice, so that when he calls us to himself he may find no obstacle in us to the exercise of his mercy and to making us sharers of his everlasting happiness.

PRAYER

O my God, who hast made known to me the grief it is for a soul to be separated from thee, give me grace to abstain from everything that could expose me to that misfortune. Grant that I may henceforth avoid every sin; that by penance I may expiate those faults of which I have been guilty, so that after death, I may not be deprived of the beatific vision, but may be admitted at once to enjoy thy presence in the courts of heaven.

Résumé, page 184.

How much the souls of purgatory suffer at the remembrance of their faults!

1. They know their number.
2. They estimate their gravity.
3. They understand what pain the heart of Jesus has suffered on account of them, how many graces they abused in committing them, how easy it was for them to avoid them.
4. They know the consequences both for themselves and their neighbor.
5. They see them as hideous stains, as captive bonds, as a wall of separation from heaven.

—Let us, then, in meditating on these truths, comprehend:

1. What a misfortune it is to offend God.
2. What woes the sinner prepares for himself.
3. How wise it is to expiate our faults in this life.
4. With what compassion the state of the souls in purgatory ought to inspire us.
5. With what fervor we ought to pray for them.

FORTY-THIRD MEDITATION

MOTIVES FOR SUCCORING THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

Take pity on me, take pity on me, at least you my friends.
—Job xix. 21.

CONSIDERATION

Let us pity the souls in purgatory, and relieve them by every means furnished by the religious state. Everything moves us to fulfill this duty, so dear to Christian and compassionate hearts.

Suffering naturally inspires pity; the sight of distress touches the heart. We cannot approach a sick man's bed without feeling pity for his sufferings, offering him our services, and assuring him of our sympathy and our willingness to do anything in our power to effect his cure or to procure him relief. Why do we not extend to the souls of purgatory this compassion and this anxiety to be of service? Would it not be cruel to forget, at the moment they most need our help, those who during life were most dear to us, and for whose recovery we would have made any sacrifice?

A good heart is all that is necessary to make us willing to perform acts of piety in behalf of the souls in purgatory. But are there not other motives? We are anxious to please God, to co-operate in the designs of

Jesus Christ, and to secure our spiritual interests. Is not this one of the most excellent means to do so?

It is with regret that God punishes these holy souls who are destined to possess him in glory; and not only does he consent, but he wills, that we should satisfy his divine justice for them, in order that he may freely exercise his mercy and liberality in their behalf.

Jesus Christ asks this of us. These souls possess his sanctifying grace and are united to him. They are in very truth the suffering members of Jesus Christ; it is he who suffers in them, and asks our assistance. What Christian could refuse him this?

Let us remember also that to help the souls in purgatory is to glorify God, to exercise charity, to acquire numberless merits, and to secure for ourselves zealous intercessors in heaven. It is also a means of assuring prayers for ourselves after death, according to these words of Jesus Christ: *With what measure you have measured it shall be measured to you again.*[1]

Finally, let us reflect that some among those souls have been united to us by the closest bonds. Let us listen to that affecting prayer which the Church puts in their mouth: *Take pity on me, take pity on me, at least you my friends; because the hand of the Lord hath touched me.*[2]

Listen to that father crying out from the midst of the flames: "O my son, whom I have fed by the sweat of my brow, for whom I have watched and toiled so much and whom I have loved so tenderly, canst thou forget me? Think, I entreat thee, of thy father who weeps and suffers, and to whom thou canst now afford

[1]Matt. vii. 2. [2]Job. xix. 21.

relief. I cry to thee from the midst of these flames; wilt thou not hear my prayer? The hand of God lies heavy upon me, but it is partly on thy account, because I was too indulgent to thee. Take pity then on thy father, who loved thee too fondly. My son, my dear son, do not forget me; pray for me and get others to pray for me."

Listen to that mother who with tears exclaims: "Remember, my son, that God made use of me to give thee existence and life; that I nourished thee with my own milk, and a thousand times clasped thee to my bosom; that my attentions to thee were unceasing; that for thee I endured privations, annoyances, apprehensions, disappointments, and every species of suffering. Ah! how many days, how many nights have I devoted to thy service! How many cares and anxieties have I suffered in rearing thee! My child, think that it is through the excessive love I bore thee, that I am now brought to these flames; it is, therefore, in thy power to end or lessen my sufferings. Ah! canst thou refuse to come to my assistance and take pity on thy suffering mother?"

Listen to those children addressing their entreaties to those who had instructed them: "O you who loved us so much before death came upon us, and who were so solicitous for our welfare, deliver us, we entreat you, from the sufferings that now afflict us! In your kindness, you were wont to take alarm at the least danger that threatened us on earth; what should you not be inspired to do for us now, when we are encompassed by raging fire?"

Listen to the lamentations of the benefactors of our schools or families. "Take pity on us," say they, "you

who dwell in our houses, occupy our lands, and enjoy the fruits of our economy! Can you forget us, when it is impossible for you to open your eyes, to walk a step, or to enter into conversation, without meeting some reminder of our name and our kindness to you? Take pity on us, you who have inherited our property, and on whom we imposed it as a special duty, by legacies and foundations, to have the holy sacrifice of Mass offered up for us, to distribute alms to the poor, and obtain for us that *eternal rest* for which we so ardently sigh! Can you forget to pray for us, can you refuse us so small a portion of what we have bequeathed to you?"

Listen to those relatives and friends with whom we were so intimate: "Take pity on us, you who mourn our death, and who perhaps erect to our memory monuments covered with eulogies. Of what avail are those well-turned phrases to us, or those wreaths of flowers with which you adorn our tombs? Fervent prayers, tears of penance, and the giving of alms, acts of mortifications offered up to God, and, above all, the holy sacrifice of the Mass and fervent Communion, these only can deliver us from our sufferings, and these we now ask you to bestow, or procure, for our relief."

APPLICATION

Whilst we are taking our meals or taking our night's repose, at those hours when we are enjoying pleasures and amusements that perhaps are not altogether befitting a Christian, we have a father, a mother, a brother, a sister, a relative, a friend, or some pupils who are burning in the flames of purgatory, and who with words

of pity implore the assistance of a prayer, a mortification, an indulgence to hasten their release from torments and their passage to that heavenly country after which they sigh so ardently. Can we turn a deaf ear and remain insensible to cries that might move the very stones? O how ungrateful and cruel we should then be!

No, no! this must not be. Let us not pass a day, nor even an hour of the day, without offering to God some prayer for those holy souls; let us frequently gain indulgences applicable to their relief. When now and then we feel a repugnance to do what God asks of us, let us think of them and generously sacrifice our inclinations to obtain their release, or at least a diminution of their sufferings. Let us induce our companions in religion and our pupils to help them. O how grateful will these poor souls be to us, and with what joy will they act the part of intercessors for us in heaven, if, by our prayers, we have thrown open to them the gates of heaven!

PRAYER

Have I reflected, O my God, that the souls in purgatory that implore my assistance, are those of my relatives, friends, and benefactors? that they are the souls of thy servants, thy elect, thy faithful followers, who in spite of the weaknesses of nature, have loved thee and died in thy grace? Alas! I am obliged to confess to my confusion that I very frequently forget them, and trouble myself little about their sufferings.

But I will not act thus any longer; I will not suffer

myself to yield to such cruel indifference. Yes, henceforth, every day, and many times in the day, I will offer up prayers and supplications in their behalf; and every time that I go to Communion, every time that I assist at the holy sacrifice of Mass, I will recommend them to the adorable Victim who offered himself up for the salvation of mankind. O my God, bless these resolutions which thou dost inspire and give me grace to adhere faithfully to them. This I ask of thee through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the afflicted and the Protector of the suffering souls in purgatory.

Résumé, page 185.

Let us have pity on the souls in purgatory, and help them:

1. They suffer: now, does not suffering inspire pity?
2. God punishes them with regret: he desires us to propitiate his justice for them.
3. It is Jesus who suffers in them and asks our help.
4. One day they shall do for us what we do for them.
5. These souls are souls of our parents, our friends, our pupils, our benefactors.

—Can we, then,

1. Be insensible to their supplications?
2. Live in cruel forgetfulness of their suffering?
3. Fail to implore the divine mercy for them?
4. Pass even a single day without praying fervently for their deliverance?
5. Be wanting in zeal to induce our fellow religious and our pupils to assist them?

FORTY-FOURTH MEDITATION

BEAUTY AND EXCELLENCE OF PARADISE

Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God.—
Ps. lxxxvi. 3.

CONSIDERATION

God did not create us for this world, wherein there is nothing capable of satisfying our hearts; wherein joys are only transient, and are preceded and followed by nights of sadness; wherein we remain but a short time, like travellers in the Orient who spend a few hours in a tent prepared for their reception.

He created us for heaven, the true land of promise, the land "flowing with milk and honey," where we shall find everything to satisfy our desires; the city of peace where he waits to enrich his servants with the abundance of his wealth; the abode whose beauty far exceeds the power of language to express or of fancy to picture. What tongue could recount all its splendors, or what imagination describe even a shadow of the beauties of paradise?

The royal prophet exclaims with admiration: *How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God!*[1]

[1] Ps. lxxxiii. 2, 3; lxxxvi. 3.

St. John, wishing to give us an idea of heaven, gathers together all that is precious in this world, all that art and genius can add to nature: *I saw the holy city Jerusalem, . . . having the glory of God, and the light thereof like unto a precious stone . . . ; and the wall of the city had twelve foundations, . . . adorned with all manner of precious stones; but the city itself pure gold. . . . And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, one to each. . . . And the city needeth not sun nor moon to shine in it, for the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. . . . And the gates thereof shall not be shut by day, for there shall be no night there. . . . In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life.*[1]

However rich this description, however great the magnificence which it pictures, it is yet far, very far from revealing the beauty and the splendor of heaven. In describing the abode of the blessed, St. John sought to accommodate himself to the weakness of our understanding. St. Paul also, in speaking of heaven, to which he was raised in spirit, and in which he saw most marvellous things, says: *The eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him;*[2] thereby indicating the utter impossibility not only of describing the magnificence of heaven adequately, but even of forming a satisfactory idea of its happiness.

Yes, men have at different times seen wonders,

[1]Apoc. xxi. 2, 11, 14, 19, 21, 23, 25; xxii. 2.
[2]1 Cor. ii. 9.

admired the master-pieces of art, and listened to the most inspiring music; but all this is nothing in comparison with what the elect both see and hear in paradise. The human imagination has framed marvellous representations of the beautiful, but neither singly nor collectively can they approach the sublimity of heaven. Let us picture to ourselves the perfection of beauty, riches, and magnificence, and when we have made the vision as captivating as possible, we can say with truth, Heaven contains all that, and *infinitely more.*

St. John Chrysostom says of this delightful abode: "Look at the blue sky when not a cloud dims the pure light that enriches the transparent atmosphere, and while gazing at that beautiful vision say to yourselves: The home in the other world promised to me as far surpasses this sun-lit vault in magnificence as the gilded ceilings of palaces outshine in splendor the humblest roofs of straw. Recall to mind all the happiness Adam enjoyed in the terrestrial paradise, and again say to yourselves: Between the paradise of the elect and that of the first man there is as great a difference as between heaven and earth."

"Heaven," says St. Cyprian, "we should look upon as our true country; thither many friends, relatives and brethren have preceded us, who long for the hour when they shall behold us reunited to them. O what joy shall we feel when we meet in paradise! With what torrents of delight shall we be inundated in that kingdom where inconceivable and eternal happiness shall be our inheritance!"

Many other Fathers of the Church have used attrac-

tive and beautiful figures in speaking of heaven. They have called it a delicious entertainment, a splendid banquet, a magnificent palace, a kingdom prepared for God's servants; but they have always added that nothing that they could say could give an adequate idea of its excellence.

Heaven is the home of peace and rest, where suffering and sorrow are unknown, where disease and death can never enter.

Heaven is the abode of charity; the country in which love is enthroned, and from which jealousy, envy and selfishness are forever banished. There the elect are one through their union of heart and soul, as the three persons of the adorable Trinity are one divine nature.

Heaven is the miracle of God's omnipotence; it is a creation of his wisdom, where everything is ordered for man's happiness. Heaven is the abode of unutterable delights; it is the river of pure joy ever full to its banks. There happiness is both perfect and permanent; there is found everything that can be desired, and nothing that is not desirable.

Heaven is the glorious city wherein God shows himself face to face to his elect; wherein the rays of his glory transfigure them and make them sharers of his own happiness. There all beauty, all magnificence, is spread before the eyes of the elect, from whom nothing is hidden. There the human heart can abundantly satisfy its immense craving for love. There all is fully accomplished: the promises of God are realized, virtue is rewarded, and happiness is the inheritance of the true servants of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION

"O beloved country," we may exclaim with St. Augustine, "we salute thee from afar. Thou art the true promised land that the Father has prepared for us *from the foundation of the world:* there awaits us the plenitude of delights that never pass away."

Since the country which we hope to possess is so beautiful and holds so much joy and happiness in reserve for us; let us esteem it as the most valuable of possessions, and willingly sacrifice everything to secure it. Let us ardently desire it, and above all let us so live as to deserve to be admitted to its enjoyment.

Let us exclaim with St. Augustine: "O joy above all joy, when shall I possess thee? when will that day come when I shall enter into the house of my God? O holy city, who could help loving thee and longing with the greatest ardor for the day that shall admit him within thy walls? When shall I leave this barren land without water, and quench my thirst from the torrent that flows in thy porch? O when will that happy moment come when I shall enter into the possession of so much happiness?"

While waiting for that happy day, let us detach our hearts from this world of exile. Let us unceasingly add to our merits by generously corresponding to grace. Let us keep united to Jesus Christ, that at death we may be judged worthy of the eternal happiness which he has prepared for us.

PRAYER

My eyes are lifted up to thee, O my God, Father of mercies. Hear, I beseech thee, the prayer of thy poor

servant, exiled in this valley of the shadow of death, and sighing for the end of his pilgrimage. Guard and preserve my soul in the midst of the dangers of this perishable life. Accompany me by thy grace, and lead me by the path of peace to the country of eternal light, to the abode of thy true rest, to that city of happiness where my eyes shall behold thy splendor, and my heart love thee without fear of ever losing thee.

Résumé, page 185.

O how beautiful is the country which we are destined to possess!

1. It is the palace of the King of kings.

2. It is the city of God, a city of gold and precious stones, a city where peace reigns supreme.

3. It is the dwelling of light and glory.

4. It is a garden of delights, through which streams of pure joy forever flow.

5. It is the temple of God, where he manifests his infinite magnificence.

But how can we explain what heaven is, since Saint Paul says that neither eye hath seen nor ear hath heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive it? —Yes, the beauty of heaven is ineffable. We ought, then,

1. To esteem heaven as the greatest of blessings.

2. To sacrifice cheerfully all others.

3. To sigh for the day when we shall be admitted into it.

4. So to live as to merit that favor.

5. To labor unceasingly to increase our merits before God, that he may fully exercise his mercy and his goodness in our regard.

FORTY-FIFTH MEDITATION

THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN

We shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is. —1 John iii. 2.

CONSIDERATION

Happiness is the object of our desires and the more or less immediate end of all our actions; but it does not exist upon this earth, which has been cursed since the first sin of Adam. Only God and those whom he has made partakers of his glory in heaven possess perfect happiness. Let us then lift up our eyes to that abode which is the object of all our hopes, and meditate on the happiness which we shall there enjoy if during this life we have made ourselves like to Jesus Christ, the Model of the predestined.

In heaven, says the apostle St. John, *we shall see him as he is,* that is to say, we shall contemplate his very essence; and our Lord Jesus Christ will reveal himself to us in his surpassing beauty and infinite glory.

What can give us an idea of the happiness of thus beholding God? Moses speaking face to face with God on Mount Sinai, and descending after forty days, his face radiant with glory; Solomon, during the solemnities of the dedication of the temple, beholding the

majesty of God under the form of a cloud, and exclaiming: *Is it credible then that God should dwell with men on the earth?*[1] St. Peter beholding his divine Master transfigured on Mount Thabor and crying out: *It is good for us to be here;*[2] the immaculate Mother of the Savior blessing God after the mystery of the Incarnation was wrought and expressing her happiness in the sublime words: *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Savior;*[3] all these tell us what happiness God sometimes bestows on his friends here below, but they do not make known to us the happiness of the elect.

O men, ask yourselves what can satisfy you, and see whether you will not possess it in superabundance when you shall possess God? What would you wish to make you happy? Riches? When the saints possess God they have heaven for their inheritance, compared to which all the treasures of earth are but as dust and smoke. Honors? The saints enjoy the greatest possible esteem, being eternally glorified by God himself and by all creatures. Pleasures? In heaven there are torrents of the sweetest and purest joys. Do you wish knowledge both extensive and profound? In heaven everything will be unveiled before your eyes, and the Word of God will communicate himself to you, and make you know all things perfectly.

In heaven we shall understand the mystery of the adorable Trinity; we shall know the attributes of God; we shall contemplate his transcendent perfections. His ravishing beauty, "so ancient and so new," will be an inexhaustible source of delight; his wisdom, compared

[1] 2 Paral. vi. 18. [2] Matt. xvii. 4. [3] Luke i. 46, 47.

with which all human science sinks into nothingness; his omnipotence, which knows no limits; his providence, which conducts everything to its end, and his love, which moved him to give us his only Son to purchase our salvation,—all will be made manifest to us.

In heaven we shall form a more just appreciation of what our adorable Savior has done for us, and we shall there experience a joy infinitely greater than that of the shepherds and the magi at Bethlehem, of Simeon in the Temple, or of the Apostles when their Divine Master appeared to them after his glorious resurrection.

In heaven we shall behold him in his glory; we shall see the stigmata of his hands and feet, from which rays of light will issue. We shall see his opened side, his pierced heart, and in his heart his goodness, love, and devotedness to us; yes, we shall then know how Jesus loved us. O what transports will then be enkindled in our souls! What sentiments of gratitude will take possession of our hearts! In such sentiments we must necessarily find the greatest possible joy.

How great will be our happiness when we shall see our Lord Jesus Christ in his glory! It will be immeasurably greater than that of the blind man who, being miraculously cured, opens his eyes to the light of a beautiful summer day; greater than that of the imprisoned exile who fell asleep in his chains, and awoke free and in his own country; or than that of the child who finds the father whom he had believed to be dead, full of life and health. Light, country, family are great blessings, but less, inconceivably less, than Jesus Christ, the Author of every blessing.

And this happiness we firmly hope will one day be ours! Then shall be accomplished in us these words of our Divine Master: *Good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall they give into your bosom.*[1] That is to say, we shall find in heaven all that we can desire; there Jesus will satisfy all the aspirations of our heart, and will reward opprobrium and humiliation with a throne of incomparable glory.

The happiness of the elect is the superabundant measure of the Gospel, which although proportioned to each one's merits, far exceeds man's natural capacity for joy and happiness. To use the expression of St. Bernard, it is "a measure without measure," a measure proportioned to the merits of the saints, but also proportioned to the infinite goodness of God, who rewards, as God, those who have obeyed his holy law.

It is not drop by drop that the elect will drink of the chalice of heavenly delights, but, in the language of Scripture: *They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house.*[2] Their nature will be raised above itself and will be so strengthened as to be capable of sustaining without fatigue or exhaustion the great joys prepared for it.

"The blessed," says St. Augustine, "will always be satiated though always hungry; always satiated, because they will enjoy perfect happiness forever; always hungry, because for all eternity they will wish to enjoy that happiness, and will enjoy it with the same contentment and the same transports of joy." King David calls this happiness a torrent and a fountain; a tor-

[1]Luke vi. 38. [2]Ps. xxxv. 9.

rent, to show the abundance of its joys; a fountain, to show that these joys are always new, and will never bring disgust or satiety.

Finally, all that can be said of that happiness is summed up in this, that it surpasses all that our understanding can conceive, all that we can possibly desire or seek.

APPLICATION

How wonderfully the thought of the happiness of heaven strengthens us to despise all the pleasures that might cause us to risk its loss! O what folly it is to seek and pursue vile, false, and perishable pleasures, when we can and should procure for ourselves such as are infinite! Let us ardently sigh after this boundless felicity, and let us desire no other. Let us love to speak of it, let us labor to merit it, and let us hesitate at no sacrifice to secure it. When we meet with difficulties in the practice of virtue let us lift up our eyes to heaven, and ask the saints in bliss if they are sorry that they deprived themselves of enjoyments here, and subjected themselves to an austere and laborious life; let us ask them what they think of the sufferings which they endured on earth, and whether they do not realize the truth of the words of St. Paul: *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come.*[1]

[1]Rom. viii. 18.

PRAYER

My God, thou hast created me for thyself, thou hast destined me to enjoy the happiness of heaven; suffer me not to become unworthy of this happiness by my sins. Hitherto I have done little to deserve it, perhaps I have even done nothing. Help me, I beseech thee, to keep the resolution which I now make in thy presence, to strive earnestly from this moment to be numbered among the elect, and to share in their happiness; for this is now the only desire of my heart.

Résumé, page 186.

Let us not seek happiness in this world, for happiness is only in heaven.

1. There we shall see God as he is.
2. There we shall see Jesus Christ in his glory.
3. There we shall enjoy the society of the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the saints.
4. There we shall possess all glory, all riches, all science, all that can be the object of highest and holiest desire.
5. There our felicity will be infinite.

—Let us be convinced of these truths, and ruling our conduct by them:

1. Let us despise and shun terrestrial joys.
2. Let us ardently desire heaven, and nothing but heaven.
3. Let us love to speak of heaven and the things of heaven.
4. Let us, above all, labor to gain heaven.
5. Let us think of heaven in our difficulties, and that thought will give us strength to overcome them.

FORTY-SIXTH MEDITATION

THE COMPANY OF THE BLESSED

How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!—Ps. cxxxii. 1.

CONSIDERATION

The royal prophet, considering the advantages of union among brethren and friends exclaims: *"How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* In what language would he have spoken of the happiness of the elect in heaven, for there they form a society, a family, all whose members have but one desire; being inspired only by truth and charity, loving only peace and order, and finding happiness in the happiness of one another? How would he have depicted their joy at beholding themselves in the closest union with all the truly virtuous men that have lived upon earth and with whatever is most worthy of love and admiration?

When about to consummate his sacrifice, Jesus Christ prayed to his Father for union among his followers: *Holy Father, keep them in thy name whom thou hast given me: that they may be one, as we also are.*[1] It is in heaven that this prayer is completely fulfilled, for there love unites all hearts. It is of those who reign there that we can truly say: They have *but one heart*

[1]John xvii. 11.

and one soul.[1] There no contention finds entrance, no jealousy, nothing that can disturb peace.

If we are struck with wonder at the harmony existing among all the members of the human body, of which the soul is the life-principle, what must be the union of the elect, what the harmony existing in that society of which Jesus Christ is the soul, directing all members with entire freedom? In heaven all know and love one another; and this knowledge and this love are sources of inexpressible happiness. There, each one seeing Jesus Christ in his neighbor, rejoices at his happiness, and thus makes it a portion of his own.

What shall we say of the joy and contentment which the elect communicate to one another? The father congratulates his son on his fidelity in following the lessons and examples of virtue he himself gave him; the son, in most affectionate terms, expresses his gratitude to his father for having provided him with the means of salvation. The mother congratulates her daughter on her courage in resisting the world and its allurements; the daughter thanks her mother most heartily for all her devoted and charitable care in training her in the way of Christian virtue. The superior congratulates his inferior on his docility in following the good advice given him; the inferior thanks his superior for his prudent counsel, by following which he obtained the grace of God. Friends, neighbors, and relatives thank one another for all the assistance rendered to enable them to attain the goal of their desires.

O if we have the happiness of being one day numbered with the elect, how great will be our joy at

[1] Acts iv. 32.

seeing united as in one family the patriarchs, the prophets, and all the just of the old dispensation, the apostles, those pillars of the Church of Christ, the martyrs bearing in their hands the palms of victory, the confessors of the faith, the virgins arrayed in dazzling brightness, the many holy persons who have either preserved their innocence or regained it by repentance; in a word, all the elect of every age and condition who have died in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!

What a glorious spectacle will be presented to our eyes when the seraphim, who always stand before the throne of God, will reveal to us the excellence of their state, the clearness and delightfulness of their vision of the divine nature, the ardor and vehemence of their love; when the cherubim will show us the treasures of divine wisdom which they possess; when the thrones, the dominations, and all other heavenly choirs will share with us their happiness, their holy and sublime thrills of delight!

But far above all this multitude of holy souls, even above the choirs of angels, let us behold all resplendent in beauty the Virgin of virgins, the joy and delight of the holy city, the Queen of this heavenly kingdom. The stars compose her crown, the sun clothes her with its light, the moon is beneath her feet. She is seated at the right hand of her Beloved, her countenance radiant with unchanging happiness, and reflecting the glory of her adorable Son. O how great will be our joy at beholding this beautiful sight!

If in this land of exile it is a happiness for a child to see its mother happy and honored, what pleasure will be ours at beholding Mary, our own kind and most

loving Mother, thus crowned with endless happiness and glory!

Lastly, let us contemplate Jesus Christ himself, the Word of God, the very essence of beauty, the source of all the happiness and glory of the saints. Let us admire his adorable body clothed with divine majesty and shining with the splendor of the Godhead; his heart glowing with love for the elect; his sacred wounds, which seem still to repeat, as on the cross, "Behold, O men, how I have loved you!" Yes, Jesus Christ will communicate himself to the saints; all will see him; all will share in his glory; all will through him have life, peace, joy, and the most perfect happiness of which they are capable.

APPLICATION

Let us bear in mind that we are called to share the happiness of the saints, and that we should do all our actions to attain this end. Let us unceasingly strive for heaven, since it is for this end that we have followed our vocation to the religious life. Let us imitate the saints, and we shall deserve to share in their happiness. Doubtless it will cost nature something to follow, like them, in the narrow way; but let us think of the happy end of their journey, which we, also, by God's grace, may and should reach.

To encourage us to greater exactness in our duties, and to support the afflictions and trials of this life, let us from time to time raise our eyes to heaven. Let us think of Jesus Christ, our adorable Savior, who calls us to him. Let us think of Mary, our kind Mother,

who stretches forth her arms to take us to herself. Let us think of our parents, our friends, of the Brothers and pupils who have gone before us into that mansion of bliss: all these invite us to imitate their example, and look to the place we are to occupy in their company through all eternity.

Let it be our ambition to attain that incomparable happiness, and let us labor to make ourselves worthy of it. Let us animate ourselves by faith and charity, seeking only the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

At the thought of the happiness which the elect cause one another, let us resolve to do all in our power to promote charity and union. Let us generously devote ourselves to the service of our Brothers. Let us study how to help them, for they are members of the same body as ourselves. Let us frequently reflect that the whole Christian family, but more particularly every religious community, should be an image of the society of the saints in heaven. Let us in time cherish that union which we hope to enjoy throughout eternity.

Let us renew our devotion to the saints, honoring and invoking those friends of God whom he has clothed with his own glory, and whose influence is all-powerful over his sacred heart. Let us lead our pupils to honor and invoke them with zeal, for this devotion is the source of many blessings. Let us, from this vale of tears, congratulate the saints on their happiness, and pray them to obtain for us, by their intercession, admission to that kingdom where sorrow and suffering never enter.

PRAYER

O good Jesus, when shall I have the happiness of possessing thee? When shall I behold the beauty of thy kingdom? When shall I be at rest from every disquietude, and taste happiness without alloy in the company of thy elect? O grant that I may become worthy of that ineffable happiness, that I may one day celebrate thy clemency and thy infinite mercy in company with thy holy Mother, St. Joseph, and all the angels and saints.

Résumé, page 186.

If it is so sweet to dwell with friends on this miserable earth, what shall it be to find ourselves in heaven:

1. With our parents, our friends, our community?
2. With all the saints?
3. With the hierarchies of angels?
4. With the Most Blessed Virgin?
5. Above all, with Jesus, our divine Savior? What company! What society! What a subject for reciprocal felicitation!

—Let us reflect that it depends on us to participate therein:

1. Let us imitate the saints, and we shall merit to share in their glory.
2. Let us be animated with their spirit and be their associates in time, and we shall be such in eternity.
3. Let us be ambitious for heaven and nothing but heaven.
4. Let us live in peace with our fellow-religious, that our communities may be an image of heaven.
5. Let us be zealous for the glory of the saints; let us felicitate them here below on their happiness, and, by their intercession, we shall be enabled to do so in the life to come.

FORTY-SEVENTH MEDITATION

THE POSSESSION OF GOD

Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.—Ps. lxxii. 26.

CONSIDERATION

In heaven the blessed see God and possess God, and are sure of seeing and possessing him forever; this is indeed the essence of their happiness. For God is perfect, infinite in beauty, goodness and power, in riches and splendor; he is order, harmony, greatness, and virtue itself in their very essence.

Let us call to mind everything that exists, or ever has existed, deserving of admiration. Let us suppose all these objects gathered in one place and resplendent with surpassing brightness. Let us multiply this brilliancy as much as we choose. Let us add all that human genius can effect in the way of beautifying nature and art. Though we expend all the activity of our imagination, we shall never be able to conceive anything comparable to God. All the magnificence of earth and sea and sky are only traces of his footsteps. The vault of heaven, with its millions of stars, is but a veil behind which his brightness is hidden from our eyes. All created beauty in comparison with the uncreated is not so much as the reflection of a lamp before the brightness of the noon-day sun.

No! There is nothing that can be compared to God.

Let us reflect too that it is God who communicates himself to the elect. They are permitted to behold him face to face, to admire him for all eternity. He manifests himself to them, giving them such strength of vision and power of penetration that, if we may so express it, they can gaze with undazzled eyes on the splendor of his divinity. O who can understand the happiness of the soul that enjoys the beatific vision? If men experience so much pleasure when they discover some truth in the order of nature, what will be the pleasure of thus contemplating Truth itself?

God knows himself, and though his intelligence is infinite, this knowledge constitutes his happiness. How, then could such knowledge fail to bring happiness to our limited understanding? How great soever may be our thirst for knowledge, it will be fully satisfied in God, who alone contains everything; and the contemplation of that Beauty ever ancient and ever new, in whom are the source and plenitude of all perfections, will prove to us a subject of joy which it is not only beyond our power to express, but which forever presents new aspects. The soul permitted to see God will discover in him at every instant of eternity new wonders that will transport it out of itself, and at the same time excite it to the greatest love and the most unbounded gratitude.

It will see how God loved it, and what he did for it because of that love. It will see how he loved men; it will measure, so to say, the length, the breadth, and the depth of that charity which led him to sacrifice his only Son for us. It will follow the steps of his providence in all that happened to it in this world,

and will see how all reveals his wisdom, his goodness, and his mercy.

What will the soul behold in the person of the Incarnate Word, who is the substantial and perfect image of his Father, and who seated on his throne of glory is to be the object of its ceaseless contemplation? What will it see in the Son of God, become, through love of us, the Son of man, and who will reveal himself to it in all the splendor of his greatness?

If those privileged souls to whom Jesus Christ has communicated himself in a special manner, have said that in these revelations they experienced so much joy that, without a miracle, nature could not have supported it, and they would thus have died of happiness; what are we to think of the happiness of a soul to which he manifests himself in all his perfections in heaven?

The elect know God, and therefore have the most ardent love for him; and they find unspeakable contentment in the exercise of this love. Our hearts yearn to love and be loved, and in heaven this craving will be fully satisfied. It is there that the faithful soul will say in the most absolute sense: *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee;*[1] or, with St. Francis of Assisi: "My God and my all!" There, too, it will hear him answer: "I am thine, O my beloved, and all that I possess is thine. I take pleasure in thee as the image of my Son, in whom I place all my love. Possess me, and in possessing me, enjoy the most perfect happiness." Who can conceive the state of a soul in such close relations with the Infinite?

[1]John xxi. 15.

The elect will find so much contentment in the possession of God, that their intellect, which is incomparably more active than ours, will not be able to conceive a happiness of whatever nature or duration, which they will not fully experience in themselves. To possess God! This is to be like God; it is in a sense even to be God; it is to be resplendent with his beauty, to be inflamed with the love of his heart, to live his life! O what a well-spring of joy to the soul, to see itself in God, pure, beautiful, and glorious, more radiant than the sun, and adorned as becomes the spouse of the King of kings!

What a deep peace steals into the soul as it says to itself: "I possess God, and am sure of possessing him forever; *I found him whom my soul loveth, and I will not let him go;*[1] I am perfectly happy, and shall be so for all eternity." O thought full of consolation and of sweetness, God himself will be our happiness! The same love, the same goodness that abound in his heart, will overflow into ours: his crown will be our crown; his glory our glory; his eternity our eternity. "What state more desirable, what happiness more perfect than this?" exclaims St. Bernard. "What sweetness is to be compared with that of living with God, living in God, who will be at the same time with us and in us!"[2]

APPLICATION

Let us often think of that happiness for which we are destined, and which we may merit by grace. O how can we help having heaven with its endless joys

[1]Cant. iii. 4. [2]Sermon on the Ascension.

constantly present to our thoughts? How can we forget that heavenly Jerusalem, our true country, while here as captives subjected to many hardships we weep by the rivers of Babylon, in a strange land?

Let us lift up our hearts and minds to heaven! Behold, Jesus Christ invites us to come and receive our crown; Mary stretches forth her arms to help us, and hastens to meet us; the angels and saints open their ranks to admit us. Yes, let us think of heaven; let us hope for heaven and sigh after it; and let us struggle unceasingly to merit it.

Let us animate ourselves to the practice of our duties by the hope of securing the great happiness which God has prepared for us; let us hearken to our Lord as he says to each of us: "Son, be not dismayed at the labors which thou hast undertaken for me; neither let the tribulations which befall thee quite cast thee down. . . . I am sufficient to reward thee beyond all measure."[1]

Let us think frequently of that happiness, and to make ourselves worthy of it, let us live pure and holy lives. Let us shun sin, and all that can be the occasion of sin. Let us watch over our senses, let us watch over our hearts, often calling to mind those words of our Divine Master: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.*[2]

PRAYER

With the greatest ardor, O my God, does my soul yearn to see and possess thee. When shall I behold

[1]Imit. Bk. III. Chap. xlvii. 1, 2. [2]Matt. v. 8.

thee? When shall I have the happiness of possessing thee as my inheritance? This is the cry of my soul. I know that I must make myself worthy of this happiness by great purity of heart and ardent zeal for thy glory. Give me then, I beseech thee, these two virtues; so that by doing thy will in this world, I may merit to enjoy thee in the next, where thou thyself art the recompense of thy elect.

Résumé, page 187.

Heaven is the perfection of happiness, because there:

1. We see God as he is.
2. We discover in him all beauty, all magnificence.
3. We love him supremely.
4. We possess him, and are sure of possessing him forever.
5. We contemplate Jesus Christ in his glory, and partake forever of his felicity.

—O beautiful heaven, O abode of supreme beatitude! Why do we not think of thee unceasingly! Let us henceforth,

1. Keep heaven ever present to our minds.
2. Cherish the hope of possessing it.
3. Desire it with all the ardor of our soul.
4. Labor to deserve it.
5. Fly from even the shadow of sin, remembering that nothing defiled can enter heaven, and that it is written: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."

FORTY-EIGHTH MEDITATION

THE BODIES OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN

Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory, according to the operation whereby also he is able to subdue all things unto himself.—Philip iii. 21.

CONSIDERATION

It is an article of faith that all men will rise again, and that the body of each man, according as it has been an instrument of good or evil, will share in the everlasting happiness or misery of the soul. It is therefore certain that the bodies of the elect will one day share the glory of their souls in heaven. And indeed nothing seems more in accordance with justice; for the body has helped in the sanctification of the soul, serving it in all its exterior acts of virtue. By it the soul has practised penance, observed chastity, exercised charity, performed works of mercy, and listened to the Word of God or announced it to others. It served the saints as a victim to be offered to God; it was in their bodies that the martyrs suffered for the name of Jesus, giving their flesh to be torn, and their blood to be poured forth for the faith. Since then the body has taken so active a part in the virtues of the saints, it is just that it should participate in the happiness which they merited by their virtues.

The body has also served the soul by making it participate in the means of salvation. The soul was purified when the body was washed in the waters of baptism; it became the habitation of the Holy Ghost when the body received the holy chrism of confirmation, and it was united to Jesus Christ and fed with the bread of angels when the body partook of the adorable sacrament of the altar. Thus the body has been a kind of channel by which the grace of God, which is the seed of glory, was communicated to the soul, and it is but just that the body should share in this glory.

The excellence of the human body shows that it is called to a very different state from that which it occupies in this world. God created it with his own hands, breathed into it the breath of life, and exalted it above all other material creatures. He has made it his temple, and he commands us to respect it as consecrated to himself. He therefore destines it for some great end. But this destiny is not attained in this world, where the body is racked by sickness, broken down by age and fatigue, subject to numberless infirmities, and always within the shadow of the grave. Its destiny must, then, be reserved for another world, for the day of eternity, when God, after destroying by death the unnatural work of sin, will restore the body to its perfect condition and form the whole man on the model of Jesus Christ.

The happiness of saints must be complete; but it would seem this could not be attained if the body did not share in their happiness; if it were not united to the soul where it receives life, and were not its companion in glory, as it had been the companion of its

sufferings; if it did not show the beauty with which it is endowed when in presence of the vision of God! Yes, the elect will enjoy even in their bodies the happiness which they have merited. Then will be fulfilled those words of holy Job: *In the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God.*[1]

Let us believe firmly in this destiny of our body, and to encourage us to practise such acts of virtue as may merit it, let us consider what kind of glory the body will enjoy, and what kind of happiness will be its inheritance if we are numbered among the elect.

Our body will be regenerated, it will possess a new life and have complete development. It will possess an enchanting beauty, because it will be resplendent with the beauty of the soul, and will thus share in the glory of God. In it the words of our Blessed Savior will be fulfilled: *Then shall the just shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.*[2]

Our body will be an ornament to the heavenly Jerusalem; a living stone in the city of God, in that holy temple wherein the Lamb is offered up in his glory for the salvation of men. Its home will be in that new world of which this, with all its magnificence, is but a faint image; and it will reflect the joy, peace, and happiness of the soul. It will no longer be an obstacle to the soul by its grossness, but being spiritualized and endowed with agility and subtility, it will at once execute all the wishes of the spirit, traversing in an instant through all space, however vast. Raised from the grave

[1]Job. xix. 25. 26. [2]Matt. xiii. 43.

to enjoy glory and happiness, it will no longer know suffering, grief, infirmity or sickness: it will be both immortal and impassable.

If we here keep our senses in subjection, they will then be to us an inexhaustible source of delight. What wonders our eyes shall discover in that abode of infinite riches, where God displays all his magnificence! What shall be our feelings when we behold the immensity of the universe, or when we contemplate the countless multitude of the saints, who will enjoy in soul and body the same happiness as ourselves! What delight we shall take in beholding the highest heaven where the elect will shine like the brightest stars, and we shall see, fairest of them all, the immaculate Queen of Heaven, already there in soul and body, and resplendent with all the glory of the King of kings!

But what shall be our happiness when we behold the sacred humanity of our adorable Redeemer, when *in our flesh we shall see our God;* when like St. Peter on Mount Thabor, but with far greater capacity for enjoyment, we shall behold him in his glory? Then indeed we shall cry out: *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*[1] "Blessed be thou for having called me to this mountain where thou hast shown thyself to me, and dost permit me to enjoy forever the contemplation of thy beauty and thy splendor!"

The hearing also will be a source of the purest delight; for we shall hear the divine harmony of the celestial choirs, of whose sweetness we cannot here form even an idea. We shall listen to the divine concert

[1]Matt. xvii. 4.

of regenerated humanity, exalting the goodness and mercy of God in the admirable words: *Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of Hosts.*[1]

The taste, the smell, the touch will also experience equally pure and appropriate delights, and we shall thus prove the liberality of God to his friends: we shall know that he recompenses as God those who are devoted to his service; that he has reserved perfect happiness for his faithful servants, whose every desire he wills to satisfy, even that of enjoying happiness in their bodies.

O how our hearts will then be inflamed with heavenly charity! To share the lot of the elect, and enjoy in soul and body this endless happiness, should be henceforth the passionate object of our desires.

APPLICATION

If we wish our bodies to share in the happiness of heaven, we must subject them to the soul. We must subdue their inclinations, and spiritualize them by the fervent reception of the body of Christ, and by the practice of mortification and penance. Let us make of them instruments to glorify God and save souls; let us make use of their strength to do the work entrusted to us, and to accomplish great good.

Let us make proper use of our senses; not opening to the world and its vanities those eyes that are destined to behold in his glory Jesus Christ, the Conqueror of the world. Let us not employ in listening to dangerous songs or conversations those ears that are des-

[1]Isai. vi. 3.

tined to hear celestial music, the hymns of angelic choirs, the song of the virgins who follow the Lamb. Let us respect our bodies which are one day to become living stones in the new Jerusalem, in that city of God where all will be pure as snow and bright as the sun at midday. Let us destroy the body of sin, as St. Paul counsels us, and it will become a glorious body in heaven.

PRAYER

O my God, give me the strength and courage necessary to wage constant war upon my body and its senses. Turn these instruments of sin into instruments of penance and mortification, that they may one day be glorified in heaven.

Résumé, page 187.

Since the body shares here below in the works of the soul, it is just that in heaven it should partake of its happiness. This is indeed a truth of faith.

If we have lived as saints:

1. Our glorified body shall shine like the sun.
2. It shall be gifted with an agility like that of the angels themselves.
3. Raised up in glory, it shall know no more pain, nor sorrow, nor sickness, nor death.
4. Its senses shall be a source of ineffable felicity.
5. Each of its members shall be clothed with a special glory, according to the virtues of which it has been the instrument.

—Let us, then, live as saints. Let us now:

1. On every occasion subject the body to the soul.
2. Make it serve as an instrument to glorify God.
3. Beware of using, to look at the world and its van-

ities, those eyes which are destined to behold Jesus Christ.

4. Withhold from listening to profane discourse those ears which are destined to hear the choirs of heaven.

5. Respect our body which is destined to be one day a living stone of the heavenly Jerusalem.

FORTY-NINTH MEDITATION

THE HAPPINESS OF THE ELECT IS ETERNAL

That being justified by his grace, we may be heirs, according to the hope of life everlasting.—Titus iii. 7.

CONSIDERATION

Men, in their eagerness for happiness, seek it with unwearied industry; but as it has no existence upon earth, all their efforts are unsuccessful. Sometimes, however, a shadow of what they pursue meets their eyes; and they experience some joy and satisfaction; but they soon learn that it is the appearance, not the reality, which they possess. All the joys of this world are too imperfect to complete our happiness; moreover, they are few, while we look for what is manifold and lasting. They are superficial in their nature, and we would fain have them penetrate every fibre of our being. They are interwoven with crosses and afflictions, and we would wish them to be free from every sorrow. They are short-lived, ending almost with the beginning of their existence, and we lament that they cannot be permanent.

O how very different are the joys of heaven! They are superabundant; they are like an impetuous river overflowing its banks. They penetrate our whole nature, memory, understanding, imagination, will, and

senses; they are free from every suffering, from every disquietude. Moreover, they are permanent; they are to last forever without alteration or diminution. Let us meditate on this last characteristic of the happiness of heaven, for it is specially suited to make us appreciate and desire to attain the joys of the elect.

Yes, the happiness of the elect is everlasting; it will have neither end nor diminution. Our Lord himself reveals this to us: *The just shall go into everlasting life,*[1] and again, *Your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you.*[2]

Moreover, since the happiness of the just is perfect, it must necessarily have no end; for were it to have an end, the blessed would necessarily look forward to that end and sorrow at the thought that they were one day to be deprived of their happiness. The more abundant and delicious their joys, the greater would be their fear and disquietude at the thought of losing them.

This happiness cannot end, because its elements are immortal and everlasting, being the vision and love of God by man. God, the object of this vision and this love, is infinite and eternal, and the soul which contemplates him is, though finite, yet immortal. Even the body, sharing therein the happiness of the soul, and having conquered death, can no longer die. The angels and saints also who will contribute to increase this happiness, are immortal. There is, therefore, no perishable element in heaven; nothing of all that constitutes the happiness of the saints, will cease to exist.

This happiness cannot end, because nothing on the

[1]Matt. xxv. 46. [2]John xvii. 22.

part of God or of creatures will destroy or diminish it. God, who is unchangeable, will always recompense the virtues of those who have merited to possess him; and recompense them eternally, because of his promises and of the merits of Jesus Christ. Creatures can be no obstacle to this; because it is in God alone that the saints find their happiness. The elect cannot diminish it; they can never desire the end of their happiness, since the contemplation of infinite beauty must always have the same attractions for them; and they can never deserve to be deprived of it, because they are impeccable and confirmed in grace. All will be able to say with St. Paul: *I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*[1]

The happiness of the elect will therefore never end; they are assured of this, and that certainty makes it perfect. They reign with Jesus Christ, *and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*[2] They see themselves encompassed by glory, which they know is incorruptible. They feel that they possess the greatest of all goods, and they are certain that it will never be taken from them.

Each one of the elect will have always present to his mind this consoling thought: "I am infinitely happy, and shall be so forever. My heart is forever immersed in an ocean of the purest delights. I possess perfect and unspeakable felicity, and shall forever pos-

[1]Rom. viii. 36-39. [2]Luke i. 33.

sess it. My soul and all its faculties, my body and all its senses, are steeped in a happiness which will never end!

"As long, then, as God shall be God, this happiness will be my inheritance, and will possess for me the same novelty, the same freshness. I shall always enjoy the same contentment, the same transports that I have experienced since I came into this abode of happiness. Yes, and throughout eternity, God will offer me new perfections to admire in him, new motives to love him with a love always new, new reasons to appreciate my happiness, and new lights to understand its greatness."

The consideration that their happiness is eternal is to the saints a never ending source of joy, and establishes them in perfect peace. It has also other effects upon them, which it will be profitable to us to call to mind. It gives them great esteem for the grace of God, by which their good works during the brief period of their life on earth merited an everlasting recompense. It inspires them with the liveliest gratitude to Jesus Christ, who merited these graces for them. It makes them prize their sufferings in this world, which, though *momentary and light,* as St. Paul said, *work above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory;*[1] and they exclaim in transports of love: "What! O Lord, for a few moments' suffering and privation, so great a happiness, and forever! We had only, as it were, a day to be just, and behold thou dost reward us during an eternity."

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 17.

APPLICATION

Let this consideration, that the happiness of the elect is eternal, make us set a true value on divine grace, by which we can merit it. Let this thought make us consider as true riches the hardships and afflictions that procure such happiness. Let it also help us see the vanity and nothingness of purely temporal blessings.

When viewed in the light of a happy eternity, what is all prosperity that passes away? What is short-lived glory? What are perishable health and life? What are earthly advantages, since they all have an end? O how little esteem they deserve from us who were created for what is eternal!

Let us persevere in the service of God, and generously consecrate all our life to him. When compared with eternity, what is the little time we are to sojourn here? And yet it is by the good employment of this short period that we may merit endless felicity.

No doubt it costs something to persevere in virtue: nature cries out against the vigilance over self that one must constantly maintain. "It is very hard," it says, "to be always watching oneself, always mortifying oneself, always fighting against and subduing oneself." "Yes," we answer without hesitation, "it is very hard, but it will not last long; there is no eternity in this world; the eternity that we should prize or fear is in the life to come." Courage, then, courage! the time of combat is short, the reward of victory will be eternal.

PRAYER

Open my eyes, O Lord, to the vanity of what passes away, that I may truly and sincerely love what is unchangeable; that I may despise all things here below, to esteem thee and to be solicitous to please thee alone, O my God, so that by thy grace, I may merit to possess thee for all eternity.

Résumé, page 188.

In this life joys are rare, superficial, evanescent, and intermingled with afflictions; in heaven they are superabundant, complete, pure, and eternal. Let us meditate on this last characteristic. The joys of heaven are unending.

1. Jesus Christ teaches it in these words: "The good shall go into life everlasting."
2. The happiness of the saints is perfect; but it could be so only on condition that it last forever.
3. God is its author: now, God is eternal, immutable; he will always wish the happiness of the elect.
4. They shall always wish it themselves.
5. Nothing created can ever disturb or weaken it.

—Let us think of the eternity of bliss in heaven; and,

1. Let us judge the things of time from only that point of view.
2. Let us value nothing but heaven and what can merit it for us.
3. Let us shun whatever might make us lose it.
4. Let us devote ourselves wholly to the service of God.
5. Let us combat our passions courageously, considering the immortal crown which shall be the reward of our victory.

FIFTIETH MEDITATION

THE THOUGHT OF HEAVEN

My son, look upon heaven.—2 Machabees vii. 28.

CONSIDERATION

Nothing is more useful to a Christian than frequently to recall the thought of heaven, lifting his soul to that happy abode and longing for that true country wherein he is to be filled with joy and to possess God securely forever. The thought of heaven makes us, with all the ardor of our souls, sigh for that day when we shall be admitted, while with the holy David we exclaim: *How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts: my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.*[1]

The thought of heaven excites in us both the desire of seeing and possessing God, and regret at not being able to do so upon earth. It makes us weary of our exile in this valley of tears, and cry out with the saints: "O when will the day of eternity come; when will these walls that separate me from my God be broken down? When shall I possess the Supreme Good, the sole object of my desires, the privation of whose presence causes me so many sighs and tears? When shall

[1]Ps. lxxxiii. 1, 2.

I behold him? When shall I be inebriated with the wine of his love? When will the hunger and thirst of my soul be appeased? Beautiful heaven, abode of happiness, it is to thee I look; it is the hope of possessing thee that sustains and encourages me. I learn by comparison with thee how vain and contemptible are all the goods of this life."

What are earthly riches, honors, and pleasures when compared with the riches, honors, and enjoyments of heaven? What is this short-lived existence in comparison with eternity? What is the magnificence of nature and art, when contrasted with the splendors of the new Jerusalem? Nothing, absolutely nothing; and whoever makes the comparison must exclaim with St. Ignatius: "O how vile this earth appears when I look up to heaven!" or with the author of the "Imitation:" "O when will the evils of this life be ended? When shall I be delivered from the slavery of sin? When shall I become truly free? When shall I be secure from all suffering of soul and body, and be established in true peace? How I grieve, O my God, that the things of earth prove such an obstacle to fixing my heart on those of heaven!"[1]

The thought of heaven which makes us despise earthly possessions and weep over the miseries of this life, also consoles us wonderfully in our sufferings. If we are the victims of injustice, we know that in heaven justice will be done us; that there the words of Jesus Christ shall be fulfilled: *Rejoice and be exceeding glad, because your reward is very great in heaven.*[2]

If death has taken from us those whom we love, let

[1]Imit. Bk. III. Chap. xlviii. 3. [2]Math. v. 12.

us remember that they have not left us forever; that they have but gone before us to the city of happiness, where they hope that we shall soon rejoin them. If we are tried, let us school ourselves to patience by these words of St. Paul: *Our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.*[1] We may also reflect that they will soon come to an end, and that if we have made a good use of them, they will be followed by an eternity of bliss. Then indeed may we exclaim: "What does it matter how much I suffer, provided I come at last safely into port!"

When we are about to sink under our labors, the thought of heaven raises our drooping strength; for it is like a kind voice saying to each of us: "Courage, my brother, thou wilt rest in thy Father's mansion. All that passes away with time is short; soon the hour will come when all labor and trouble shall cease."

It is in heaven that these words of the Apocalypse are fulfilled: *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*[2] It is with this thought that a good God consoles us in our exile and lightens our labors. By it also he animates us to the practice of every Christian virtue.

Moreover, it is by it that he encourages us to persevere to the end in our labors, and in the practice of obedience and humility. "My son," says he to each of us, "do not lose courage. Consider that the end of thy labors is at hand. See what will be their fruit. Think of the exceeding greatness of their recompense. Eternal life is well worth such struggles; yea and far greater!"

"Thou wilt experience temptation, but raise thy eyes

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [2] Apoc. xxi. 4.

to heaven, where I abide with my saints; they also had great assaults to sustain during life; now they enjoy happiness, rest and security, and will dwell with me forever in my kingdom. So will it be with thee, if thou but imitate them. In heaven thou wilt gather with them the fruits of obedience and submission, and will find every wish fully gratified. Happy are they who humble themselves; for, since the gate of heaven is low, only such can enter, as have become like little children!"

"Couldst thou see the eternal crowns of the saints, and the delights enjoyed now by those whom the world looked upon with contempt, thou wouldst humble thyself profoundly, and prefer obedience to authority, were it only over one; thou wouldst be solicitous for nothing of this world, thou wouldst feel pleasure in suffering everything and from every one, and look upon it as the greatest of favors to be reckoned as of no account among men."[1]

APPLICATION

Let the thought of heaven be always present to our minds, and sustain us in our journey through life. "Let us," says St. Augustine, "never lose sight of the country where we shall soon arrive." We shall indeed meet with sufferings on our way thither, but let us bear in mind that they will be followed by endless bliss. And what is all that we can do or suffer, when compared with the recompense prepared for us?

O it is hard, no doubt, to fight against one's inclina-

[1]Imit. Bk. iii. Chap. xlvii.

tions, to conquer oneself: but there is heaven! It is hard to condemn oneself not to speak a word without permission; but then there is a heaven! It is very painful to sacrifice one's will, to live under obedience and to humble oneself before all: but there is heaven! It needs great efforts and much patience to live in peace with all, to work with profit among our pupils, to be constantly a subject of edification: but then there is heaven! Yes, there is heaven! Behold the recompense for all our sacrifices! Can we ever be afraid of making too many?

Let us, then, recall this salutary thought when our souls experience any faintness, when they seem to hesitate between God and the world, when they are inclined to be dejected and dispirited. O then let us raise our eyes, and think of the glorious crown in the hands of Jesus Christ which he is ready to place upon our brow, if, arming ourselves with courage, we correspond to grace and persevere faithfully in virtue.

PRAYER

O God, who dwellest in light inaccessible, and before whom the angels veil their faces with their wings, when wilt thou suffer the brightness of eternal day to dawn upon my sight and put to flight the deep night in which I am buried? O Lord, thou hast prepared for us a day of happiness of whose brightness that of the sun is but a feeble image. But why does it so long delay its coming? When, O Lord, will its beauty break upon my sight? When shall my soul, freed from its bonds, take its flight to find rest in thee, the centre of

my happiness? When will it be suffered to see, to praise, and to love thee for eternity?

Résumé, page 188.

The thought of heaven is one of the most useful helps for the Christian.

1. It excites in him an ardent desire for the happiness which is prepared for him.
2. It detaches him from the things of this world.
3. It inspires him with a lively horror of sin.
4. It consoles him in his sorrows; it helps him to bear with courage the pains of life.
5. It encourages and strengthens him in the accomplishment of the good which God demands of him.

—Let us, then, think often of heaven, but especially,

1. When temptation assails us.
2. When labor weighs heavily upon us.
3. When the pains of life overwhelm us.
4. When we feel our heart inclining toward creatures.
5. When God demands of us some sacrifice.

FIFTY-FIRST MEDITATION

NOVEMBER 1—FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

I saw a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.—Apoc. vii. 9.

CONSIDERATION

The Church has established the feast of this day principally to bless and glorify God in his saints; to congratulate them on their happiness; to implore their intercession; to place before our eyes the virtues which they practised, and to incite us to imitate their example with fidelity, courage and perseverance.

God alone is essentially good. By his grace, if men co-operate with it, he is the Author of all sanctity. It is he who, in and with the just on earth, practises virtue, prays, labors and does penance. He it is who is the Architect of the new Jerusalem. He it is who, after having chosen his followers, makes them the living stones of that city of happiness, that temple of the Lamb where all magnificence and perfect harmony of parts are to be found.

Sanctity is the life of God within us, our conformity to his image through his life-giving Spirit. It is even upon earth a sublime communication of himself,

which is to receive its full development in heaven. How, then, can we call this to mind without blessing him who is its Author? How can we think of the beauty, the glory, the happiness of the saints without extolling the generosity of him who has made them what they are, given them all that they possess, and who, if we show equal fidelity, will use the same liberality towards us?

The angels and the saints never cease praising God for his bounties and singing hymns of thanksgiving, as St. John intimates in this passage of the Apocalypse: *I heard as it were the voice of many multitudes in heaven, saying: Alleluia. Salvation, and glory, and power, is to our God.*[1] With them let us bless the Sovereign Lord who shows his happiness with them and crowns his own gifts in crowning them. With them let us bless Jesus Christ, who, by his humiliations, his sufferings, and his death, recovered for us our right to heaven, and opened to us that abode of peace and happiness. Let us glorify our Divine Redeemer who came upon earth to rescue man from the abyss of sin and death, to place him again in the way of sanctification, and to enable him to work out his glorious destiny.

Happy they who, after being united to him on earth, are now united with him in heaven! With the Church let us congratulate them on their happiness, but still more on the virtues by which they merited it. O how great is their happiness! how wide and deep the river of consolation that flows through the city of God! How beautiful the abode of the King of kings, wherein he displays all his magnificence! How rich those who

[1]Apoc. xix. 1.

are admitted within it, and on whom he pours forth his treasures without stint or measure! Of them it is written: *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord; they shall praise thee forever and ever.*[1]

You are happy, ye elect of God, who see him face to face! Your trials are ended; your labors have been followed by perfect repose; no fear, no inquietude can penetrate to your souls; every wish of yours is accomplished; your hearts, like the seraphim before the throne of the Most High, burn with pure love; you have attained the end of your existence, and enjoy perfect and unending felicity! Deign to remember us who are still exposed to the dangers from which you have been delivered.

By this festival the Church proclaims the dogma of assistance given to us by the saints, and invites us to invoke them as protectors. In her office she begs of God that the faithful may be preserved through the intercession of the saints. She calls on Mary, our chief Patroness, who implores the clemency of the Father. She begs the blessed in heaven to remove all evils from us. She entreats the apostles, the prophets, the martyrs, the confessors, the virgins, all the saints of God, to obtain for us pardon and the grace to be one day admitted with them to the kingdom of heaven. Let us unite with the Church, and offer up fervent prayers to the saints. Let us beg them to aid us by their protection, that we may arrive at that heavenly country to which they have gone before us.

But let us not forget what they have done to merit this. The Church in her office reminds us of it. She

[1]Ps. lxxxiii. 5.

tells us that they are true servants of God, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ who conformed their lives to the maxims of the Gospel; who practised poverty of spirit, detachment from creatures, humility, sweetness, patience, and charity; who kept their hearts pure; who hungered and thirsted after justice; who loved peace, pardoned their enemies, suffered with joy for the name of Jesus, in the hope of the recompense reserved for them in heaven. Such were their works. Behold the price at which they purchased the blessings which they now possess.

Let us ask them if, when they compare their present state with the trials of this life, they think they have purchased it too dearly, and let us hear them answer us in the words of the apostle: *Present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh . . . above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.*[1] How they now rejoice over the better part which they have chosen! How truly they felicitate themselves on having despised the world and its deceitful enjoyments, resisted the temptations of the devil and the flesh, supported with patience the sufferings of life, and taken up and carried with joy the cross of Jesus Christ!

How those who had embraced the religious life now rejoice that they corresponded to the grace of their vocation, were faithful to their vows, kept their rules, tended constantly to perfection, and labored zealously for the salvation of souls! With what transports do they bless God for the trials to which he subjected them: trials that gained them the eternal glory which

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 7.

they now enjoy, and which all may enjoy who faithfully imitate their virtues!

APPLICATION

Let us walk in the footsteps of the saints, that we may one day be numbered in their company. They lived the life of Jesus Christ; let us imitate them. Let us, according to our state, do the works which they have done. Let us enter resolutely on the way which they have trod, and in which they invite us to follow; and let us take care never to stray from it. After their example, let us be fervent in the service of God, mortifying our senses, praying, working, suffering, and devoting ourselves to the service of our neighbor. Like them, let us love Jesus Christ with all our heart, and let us prove our love by taking his cross upon our shoulders.

Without doubt, all this is repugnant to human nature, which loves its own ease. But can we hesitate when we see what the saints have done under circumstances far more trying than ours; when we remember how they crucified the flesh and its concupiscences, in order to live a life of grace?

Yes, let us imitate them, whatever it may cost: and if we experience difficulty and discouragement, let us raise our eyes to heaven, and, contemplating its magnificence, exclaim: "Behold the recompense which God reserves for me if I remain faithful to his law. The happiness which is the inheritance of the elect will be mine also if, like them, I do his adorable will in all things."

PRAYER

Blessed citizens of heaven, angels and saints who behold God in his glory and are all-powerful with him, deign to intercede for us who are exposed to so many perils, and obtain for us strength and courage to follow faithfully in the path of justice which you have trod, that, like you, we may arrive at that everlasting happiness which awaits the just at the end of life's weary pilgrimage. Amen.

Résumé, page 189.

The Church, in the feast of this day,

1. Blesses and glorifies God in those whom he has made sharers of his glory.
2. Felicitates the elect and rejoices in their happiness.
3. Invokes them, and implores their intercession.
4. Reminds us upon what conditions they gained heaven.
5. Excites us to imitate the saints, that, following in their footsteps, we may reach the same end.

—Let us enter into the spirit of this feast:

1. Let us praise God in his saints.
2. Let us glorify the blessed in heaven.
3. Let us beg of them to intercede for us.
4. Let us consider what their works have been.
5. Let us imitate them, and thus render ourselves worthy to share one day in their glory.

FIFTY-SECOND MEDITATION

NOVEMBER 2—ALL SOULS' DAY

Lay out thy bread and thy wine upon the burial of a just man.—Tobias iv. 18.

CONSIDERATION

After the feast of the Church triumphant comes that of the Church suffering. Yesterday we celebrated the glory of the saints in heaven; to-day we make our memento of the souls in purgatory. O with what just reason has this feast been instituted! We live, alas! in cruel forgetfulness of the dead. Carried away by the whirl of excitement and the pressure of business, we scarcely think of those who are no longer with us; we close our ears to the groans and lamentations that rise from the grave. Therefore the Church to-day, by her ceremonies, her prayers, the exhortations of her ministers, the decorations of her altars, and the mournful peal of her church-bells, bids us, "Remember the dead."

Yes, remember the dead, and pray for the souls in purgatory. What Christian heart can refuse to do so? Those souls suffer inexpressible torments, the least of which, could we conceive it, would terrify our imagination. They have the greatest, the most ardent desire of seeing and possessing God; and God withdraws from them till they have paid the debt due to his justice.

How painful must this separation be to them! How many tears must it not cause to flow! To be kept at a distance from God, who is the Sovereign Good, is to be in the most absolute destitution and indigence, to be tortured with hunger and thirst. It is a suffering so great that, were it not for the certainty of being one day delivered from it, it would equal the torments of hell.

Not only are those souls deprived of the sight of God; they also suffer the punishment of fire. Fire penetrates them, fire devours them. They are cast into a furnace kindled by the justice of God. They see, touch, breathe nothing but flames, scorching flames that burn to the very marrow, lurid flames that produce only a hideous night, flames that many authors have believed to be the same as those of hell.

And these souls are the souls of our brethren in Jesus Christ, our relatives, our companions in religion, our benefactors, our pupils; of those whom we have loved and mourned. Let us prove the sincerity of our love and our tears by the relief which we offer. This is not only possible, but even very easy for us. How can we do it? By prayers, by assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, by communions, works of piety, provided that in all cases we have an intention of gaining the indulgences attached thereto. All these things are ordinary acts in our holy state; yet they would afford great relief to the suffering souls, if offered up in their behalf.

Happy is the rich man who helps the poor! We are rich, since we have at our disposal the merits of

Jesus Christ, we to whom the inexhaustible treasures of the Church are open; and the souls in purgatory are poor, and ask our assistance. Can we be so heartless as to refuse them? Which of us would willingly refuse to help a traveller dying of thirst, who asked of us a few drops of water in the name of Christ? And yet, is not that precisely what we do when we turn a deaf ear to the souls in purgatory?

It is true, they are perfectly resigned, and bless the hand that chastises them. But yet they turn towards us their eyes, bathed in tears, and from the depths of the abyss cry out: *"Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends; because the hand of the Lord hath touched me.*[1] Listen to our supplications. Speak to the Lord, and he will hear you. Implore his mercy for us. You who love us, save us!"

One must indeed have a heart of stone to remain unmoved by such tears and lamentations; to be unwilling to undertake and sacrifice everything to appease the divine justice in their behalf, and obtain their deliverance, or at least a diminution of their sufferings.

Such indifference would also argue a want of correspondence on our part to the designs of God. These souls are united to him in charity; they are spouses and members of Jesus Christ; it is he who suffers in them. O how ardently the Father wishes us to appease his justice, that he may display to them only mercy and liberality! Their deliverance glorifies him; for it increases the number of the elect who celebrate his goodness and generosity.

[1] Job xix. 21.

The assistance which we render them associates us with Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. He has offered satisfaction for them, and we apply his merits. He puts into our hands the chalice of his blood, that we may pour some drops of it into that abyss of fire where they are held captive. What greater charity than this can be conceived? This is the noblest exercise of the queen of virtues.

Devotion to the souls in purgatory is pre-eminently advantageous to us. In its practices it is most meritorious, and contributes greatly to enrich us for heaven. It is an abundant source of blessings. *Blessed,* says the royal prophet, *is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the evil day.*[1] It is on him who relieves these suffering souls that this blessing falls. Yes, God *will deliver him in the evil day.* A time will come when he too must render an account of his life before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, and perhaps be condemned to purgatory. Then will he be rewarded for what he has done for others. The prayers of the just upon earth will be applied to him and will hasten the day of his deliverance.

Besides, he will have the protection of the saints in heaven. The souls that he helped to deliver will remember him, and after obtaining from God many graces for him during life, they will procure for him a shortening of his sufferings after death, that through endless ages he may join them in celebrating God's infinite mercy.

[1] Ps. xl. 2.

APPLICATION

While meditating on the sufferings of purgatory, let us remember that they are caused by venial sins not yet pardoned, or by mortal sins the guilt of which has been forgiven, but the full atonement for which has not yet been made. Let us, then, fear sin, and avoid it at any cost. Let us do penance for that which we have committed. Let us in this life discharge our debt to divine justice, and not put it off to that day when justice will be exercised in all its severity.

As Christian teachers, let us be earnest in instilling into the minds of our pupils devotion to the souls in purgatory. From it the young will derive great moral benefits, for nothing is better calculated to develop in their hearts compassion, tenderness, filial love and gratitude. Moreover, it will be a source of many graces either to keep them in the path of virtue, or to lead them back to it if unhappily they have gone astray.

Let us display all possible zeal for the deliverance of the souls in purgatory. Then, on the last day, Jesus Christ will address us in these words: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. . . . . I was in prison and you came to me.*[1]

PRAYER

O God, who dost delight to pardon, hearken to our

[1]Matt. xxv. 34-36.

prayers. Take pity on the suffering souls whom thy justice detains at a distance from thee, and by the merits of Jesus Christ, who offered himself in expiation for the sins of men, open to them the gates of heaven, that they also may join their voices to those of the angels and saints in celebrating thy infinite mercy forever. Amen.

Résumé, page 189.

What faithful heart can refuse to practise devotion to the souls in purgatory!

1. These souls suffer inconceivable pains.
2. These souls are dear to us.
3. We can give them relief.
4. They beseech us to do so.
5. By assisting them we enter into the views of God, we give joy to the heart of Jesus, we acquire numerous merits, we assure ourselves of the protection of the souls whose deliverance we have hastened.

—Therefore, as the Church exhorts us,

1. Let us remember the souls of the faithful departed.
2. Let us contemplate them in the fires of purgatory.
3. Let us hear them imploring our suffrages.
4. Let us pray for them; let us mortify ourselves in order to hasten their deliverance; let us assist at Mass, and offer up communions in their behalf.
5. Let us cultivate in our pupils devotion to these holy souls.

MEDITATIONS ON SIN AND THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

FIRST MEDITATION

SIN IN GENERAL

Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent, for if thou comest near them they will take hold of thee.—Eccles. xxi. 2.

CONSIDERATION

Sin is the only real evil, the sovereign evil, the evil that has been the source of all other evils, the only evil which in truth is to be feared, the only one to be avoided at any cost. Sin is a disobedience to the law of God, a violation of his orders, a refusal to submit to his supreme authority; it is the rebellion of man against God. If the greatness of an offence is measured by the dignity of the person offended as compared with the offender, what must be the enormity of sin?

He who is offended is the Master of heaven and earth, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He possesses all authority, all power, and everything in both the natural and the supernatural order is subject to him. And it is man who offends him, man who is

nothing but weakness, misery, and degradation; who exists only by his kindness, who owes to him all that he has and all that he is, and whom his hand holds suspended over the abyss of annihilation. O we cannot conceive the heinousness of this offence, since infinity separates him who gives from him who receives the insult.

Sin outrages God the Father whose image it effaces in the soul, God the Son whose blood it tramples on, and God the Holy Ghost whose illuminations and attractions it opposes or resists.

Sin outrages all the perfections of God: his omnipotence which it defies, his wisdom which it ignores, his goodness which it abuses, his authority which it despises, his justice which it provokes, his liberality which it repays with ingratitude, and his providence whose designs it contravenes.

Sin unites in itself the most odious characters; the character of rebellion against the Master of all things, for by his acts the sinner says, with the arch-fiend, *I will not serve;*[1] the character of rashness, presumption, and audacity, for the sinner is nothing in comparison with him whom he insults; the character of perfidy, for every sin is a violation of most sacred promises, most solemn engagements; the character of ingratitude, for it is a base return made to a most loving Father, a most devoted Friend, a most generous Benefactor.

O sinners, have you ever reflected on this? He whom you offend is the one from whom you have received everything, and who has lavished upon you every care

[1]Jer. ii. 20.

and attention; who came down from heaven to deliver you from death, and who, to save you, sacrificed his blood and his life. You ignore these favors that deserve and claim from you the most unbounded gratitude. Nay, more: not only do you ignore God's favors to you, but you turn them against God himself.

What horror would not fill your breast if a beggar, after receiving a valuable gift from a charitable person, were to use it to injure and betray his benefactor! And yet this is precisely what you do when you offend God and use the gifts of his bounty to oppose his divine will. Sin, then, must necessarily be infinitely hateful to God, and he must pursue it with his vengeance wherever he meets it. What an evil must it not be since it thus merits the hatred of God, and compels him to exercise upon his creatures such severity as makes you shudder at the thought!

Sin is followed by the most deplorable consequences both to society and to individuals. It is either remotely or immediately the source of all the miseries of which we are witnesses or victims. It is the cause of all the woes of humanity. It is the fountain from which spring forth all those sorrows that make this earth a valley of tears. It broke up the friendly intercourses of Adam and Eve with God, and drew the curse of heaven down upon them and their descendants. It shakes society to its very foundations, and introduces discord and ruin where union once prevailed. Woe to the family wherein it reigns! Woe to the religious community into which it enters! Disunion and discord enter with it, and are soon followed by total ruin.

Sin dishonors the soul, robs it of its beauty, and reduces it to misery and disgrace by closing heaven against it. It disturbs and agitates the soul, making it wretched even in this life. It gives it over to remorse which pierces it like an arrow or gnaws it like a worm. *Tribulation and anguish*, says the Scripture, *upon every soul of man that doeth evil.*[1] Peace flies from him, and he then experiences what *an evil and bitter thing*[2] it is to have abandoned the Lord his God.

And yet, the evils that are the consequences of sin in this world are in no way to be compared with those that are reserved for its punishment in the next. Let us ask the souls in purgatory what are the punishments of sin, and they will tell us of that prison of fire in which they are held captive, and will relate to us all the torments which they endure. Let us ask the same question of the damned, and they will answer by pointing to the abyss in which they are plunged, the fire that devours them, and the unspeakable sufferings and despair which so affect them. O my God! what should we think of sin could we but see the torments by which it is punished in the dungeons created by thy justice!

In comparison with sin, what are poverty, sickness, infirmities and death but a mere nothing! Were it therefore necessary to sacrifice all the advantages of this world in order to avoid sin, all fortune, liberty, honor, health and life, no man should hesitate for a moment to do so.

For the same reason, supposing that one sin, however small, could procure us all advantages, or even that by committing it we could convert whole nations

[1]Rom. ii. 9. [2]Jer. ii. 19.

and deliver from purgatory all the souls detained therein, even then we should not dare consent to it; for whatever glory creatures are capable of rendering to God can by no means compensate for the offence done him by even one sin. Such is the teaching of the Church, and by it we must regulate our conduct.

APPLICATION

Let us dread sin, and fear even its shadow. Let us at every cost avoid so great an evil, and flee its occasions. Let us beware of exposing ourselves to temptation, for alas! in this life we stand upon a slippery incline, and need to use every precaution to keep ourselves from sin.

Let us inspire our pupils with the most lively horror of sin, and let us direct our vigilance to keep it far from them. What greater service could we render them? Where can we find an object more worthy of our zeal as Christian teachers?

Let us remember our past sins and mourn them before God. With true contrition, let us prostrate ourselves before the Lord whom we have offended, and let us weep over our wanderings. Let us say to him, with the prodigal son, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee;*[1] and with David, *Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.*[2]

Let us do penance for our offences. Let us side with divine justice against ourselves, and punish our past infidelity to God's law. How many saints have bewailed through life a few sins of frailty! What then

[1]Luke xv. 21. [2]Ps. lv. 2.

should we do, whose sins have been so many and so grievous? Let us go with contrite hearts to the tribunal of penance; but let us go also with confidence and love, for Jesus has satisfied for our sins, and through him we can obtain mercy.

PRAYER

O Jesus, Divine Lamb, who takest away the sins of the world, pardon me all the faults of which I may have been guilty. Reconcile me to thy Father, and grant that I may persevere until death in the practice of virtue. I beg of thee these favors by the cross on which thou didst pour forth thy blood to effect my reconciliation, and through the intercession of thy most holy Mother, whom thou hast made the Refuge of sinners.

Résumé, page 316.

O how great an evil is sin!

1. It outrages God, who is infinitely perfect, being Sovereign of heaven and earth.
2. It outrages him in all his perfections.
3. It combines the most odious characters—rebellion, temerity, perfidy, ingratitude.
4. It is the object of God's hatred.
5. It has the most deplorable consequences in time and in eternity.

—It is necessary, then,

1. To fear it with a great fear.
2. To avoid it at any cost, to shun its occasions.
3. To inspire our pupils with horror of it.
4. To deplore having committed it so often.
5. To do adequate penance for it.

SECOND MEDITATION

THE SIN OF LUCIFER AND HIS ANGELS

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer!—
Isai. xiv. 12.

CONSIDERATION

Lucifer and his angels have fallen! Let us meditate on this terrible fall, and learn from it how great an evil it is to offend God, and how terrible are the chastisements inflicted by his justice.

In the beginning of time, according to many doctors of the Church, when God said, *Be light made*,[1] the angels were created. In the first moment of their existence they presented themselves in millions before the throne of the Most High and offered him their adoration. What beauty, what perfection, in those spirits of light! God was pleased to make them his privileged creatures out of the myriads of beings whom he called into existence. Their nature was superior to that destined for man; their intelligence was sublime and capable of contemplating truth, as it were, in its essence; their will was inclined to good, and tended naturally to the perfect accomplishment of the divine will. They were clothed with justice, innocence, and sanctity. God placed them near him, and, to a certain extent, he shared with them his happiness. In a word,

[1] Gen. i. 3.

they were worthy ornaments of heaven, where the Lord of all things displays his magnificence, and where he prepares a dwelling place for his friends.

Among them there was one who shone above the others, and on whom God seemed to have exhausted his munificence. This was Lucifer, the first of these spirits of light, to whom the prophet Ezechiel alludes when he says: *Thou wast the seal of resemblance, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty; thou wast in the pleasures of the paradise of God: every precious stone was thy covering; . . . thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day of thy creation until iniquity was found in thee.*[1]

Such was Lucifer; but there came a time when, as the prophet says, *iniquity was found* in him. God wished the celestial spirits to glorify him for his gifts, and thus merit the perfect happiness for which he destined them; and therefore subjected them to a trial and exacted of them a tribute of obedience. The greater number of them corresponded perfectly to his designs, and were therefore confirmed in the possession of eternal happiness; but all did not follow their example.

Lucifer, blinded by pride, and worshipping his own perfections, refused to submit to God, revolted against him to whom he owed all, and dragged with him in his rebellion a multitude of angels also blinded by self-esteem. Such was the first sin, which was to be, alas! the beginning of so many others! Such is the origin of evil, the source of that torrent of iniquity which was afterwards to desolate the earth and which will last as long as the world.

[1]Ezech. xxviii. 12-15.

But how odious is not the sin of the angels! It is a sin of pride, according to the words of Isaias to the fallen angel: *And thou saidst in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.*[1]

It is a sin of revolt; for God, speaking by the mouth of Jeremias to the rebel spirit, addresses to him these reproaches: *Thou hast broken my yoke, thou hast burst my bonds, and thou saidst: I will not serve.*[2]

It is a sin of ingratitude, as appears from the prophet Ezechiel: *Thou wast in the pleasures of the paradise of God until iniquity was found in thee.*[3] The wicked angels insulted him to whom they owed everything, and they insulted him because of his gifts, which they preferred to himself.

It is a sin of scandal; for the sin of one angel was communicated with frightful rapidity to another, and so effected the ruin of an immense number of celestial spirits. Moreover, the sin was committed in heaven, the abode of sanctity, and committed with full knowledge and perfect freedom.

What malice, then, was there not in that sin! Consequently it was punished instantaneously and in the most terrible manner. "Who is like to God?" cried out the holy Archangel Michael, as he rallied round him the good angels; and immediately he hurled into hell the prince of pride and all who participated in his sin.

But what a change then took place in their fallen

[1]Isai. xiv. 13, 14. [2]Jer. ii. 20.
[3]Ezech. xxviii. 13-15.

spirits! Their intelligence, heretofore elevated and noble, was now busied with none but base and criminal thoughts; their will, once so holy, now aspired only to wickedness, tended only to evil; their hearts, once on fire with holy love, were now devoured by hatred. They had been destined to assist before the throne of the Most High and to offer up to him the prayers of men, and their ministry became one of iniquity and death. *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer!*[1] cries out the prophet Isaias. "To what a condition art thou reduced! The hand of the Lord hath struck thee, and thou shalt never again be other than the most miserable and contemptible of creatures!"

O Lord, how terrible is thy justice! Thou regardest neither the number of the guilty nor their dignity, nor the glory which they might have procured thee had they been restored to grace. Those guilty spirits commit sin, and immediately thy omnipotence hurls them from thy presence forever. Now, from the depths of hell, in their despair and anguish, they cry to us: *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*[2]

APPLICATION

Let us fear God and dread his judgments. Let us tremble at the thought that he did not show mercy to the rebel spirits, and let us exclaim in sentiments of just terror: *If God spared not the angels that sinned,*[3] how can I promise myself that he will spare me?"

Let us keep our sins present to our minds and con-

[1]Isai. xiv. 12. [2]Heb. x. 31.
[3]2 Pet. xi. 4.

ceive a true sorrow for them! Alas! by them we are sunk as low as the devils. Let us humble ourselves, saying, with St. Bonaventure, "I behold myself, O my God, more frightful than Lucifer. When pride sullied his beauty, no instance of thy vengeance had yet been given, and I, after beholding his chastisement, have despised thy orders. Thou didst establish him in justice only once, but as for me, thou hast restored me to it frequently. He abandoned a God who did not hinder him from forsaking his service, while I abandon a God who comes to seek me. . . . And if he and I have sinned, he offended a God who gave him no opportunity of return, and I have offended a God who died to save me."

Let us, then, be convinced that we deserve to be placed under the very feet of Lucifer, and let us resolve to humble ourselves before God and men. Let us be children of obedience, saying, in opposition to the devil, "I will serve thee, O Lord, with constant and inviolable fidelity."

Like the good angels, let us be zealous for the glory of God. Let us correspond to all his designs upon us, and thus merit the happiness which the rebel angels lost, and which will be our inheritance if we persevere in virtue.

Let us cherish a horror of sin, remembering the chastisement which it merited for Lucifer and his angels. Let us ask pardon of God for the sins which we have committed, and feel a most lively sorrow for them. Alas! have not our sins all the characters of the sin of the angels? Is not sinning in religion like sinning in heaven, and convicting ourselves of the most

odious ingratitude? Let us, then, bewail our misfortune in offending God. So we shall find favor in his eyes and escape the frightful lot of the rebel angels.

PRAYER

I am seized with fear, O my God, at the thought of thy judgments; for even the heavens are not pure in thy sight. Alas! what should I who am only dust expect? In thy angels thou didst find wickedness, what wilt thou not find in me, who am but weakness and corruption! Take pity on me, thy servant. I have sinned, but I implore thy mercy, and beg of thee, through the merits of Jesus Christ, to pardon me and give me the kiss of peace and reconciliation. Amen.

Résumé, page 316.

Lucifer and his angels fell through pride and the spirit of independence.

1. God had endowed them with a great number of perfections.

2. Wishing them to merit the happiness which he destined for them, he subjected them to a trial.

3. But they refused to obey him.

4. What malice in their sin which was at once a sin of revolt and of ingratitude, and which was committed in heaven itself!

5. But how great is its punishment!

—No, God did not spare his angels!

1. Let us, then, fear to offend him.

2. Let us dread sin more than death.

3. Let us keep ourselves in the most profound humility.

4. Let us be truly obedient religious.

5. Let us watch over ourselves, being mindful of our frailty.

THIRD MEDITATION

THE SIN OF ADAM AND EVE

Death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned.—Rom. v. 12.

CONSIDERATION

Let us consider how excellent was the state of Adam and Eve before their sin. With what gifts had not God favored them! Their understanding was enlightened with the clearest light, their hearts were inflamed with the fire of divine love and inundated with the sweetest joy; their innocent souls were full of peace and happiness; their passions all under subjection. Everything in them was in order and contributed to their happiness. Everything around and about them contributed to the same end, all creatures recognized their dominion, and they had for their abode a garden of delights where they procured without difficulty all that they could desire for their bodily needs.

God, as the royal prophet says, made them *a little less than the angels,*[1] crowning them with glory and honor, and setting them over the works of his hands. He even came down from heaven to converse familiarly with them. They then possessed all the blessings that

[1] Ps. viii. 6, 7.

they could desire; for St. Bernard says of the first man: "What was wanting to him who was guided by mercy, taught by truth, and borne in the arms of the God of peace?" Moreover, this world was placed under their dominion. God also destined them to reign in the next, where they were to replace the angels driven thence on account of their pride and disobedience.

But, alas! sin comes to destroy this beautiful system in the very beginning, and to strip our first parents of their admirable prerogatives. Wishing them to recognize his sovereign dominion over them, and to merit by fidelity to his orders both the happiness which they were enjoying and that also which he destined for them, he gave them this commandment: *Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.*[1]

It was easy for them to obey the Lord; but Eve listened to the insidious words of the serpent: she drew near the tree, and ate the forbidden fruit. Afterwards she presented it to Adam, who, by a guilty complaisance, became, like her, a sinner.

Such was the first sin committed in this world: a sin of imprudence on the part of Eve, who gave ear to the suggestions of the devil, thereby putting herself directly in the danger of sin; a sin of weakness on the part of Adam, who accepted from Eve the deadly fruit which she offered him; a sin of pride for both Adam and Eve who committed it with the expectation of becoming like gods; a sin against God's veracity, in

[1] Gen. ii. 16, 17.

venturing to doubt his words, while they give credit to those of the spirit of lies; a sin of contempt of God, his authority, his justice, and his goodness; a sin of sensuality, of gluttony.

Behold the characters of the sin! But what fearful punishment does it not entail! Scarcely was it committed when Adam and Eve discovered that the serpent had deceived them, and that God was true to his promises. The serpent had said to them, *You shall be as gods;* and they see themselves debased to the level of the brute. They expected to derive pleasure from their act, and no sooner had they committed it than everything in them became disturbed, agitated, and an occasion of sadness.

Formerly, the presence of God constituted all their happiness, but now so great is their dread of it that they hide from his sight. His voice, which used to fill them with joy, now pierces them with fear; they have a presentiment that he is about to pronounce the sentence of their condemnation.

Their souls, stripped of grace and injured in all their faculties, are objects of horror in the eyes of God. Their minds are a prey to ignorance, doubt and error; their hearts are torn by a thousand tyrannical passions; their consciences are troubled, disturbed and fearful of divine justice, which soon punishes them as they deserve. They are driven ignominiously from the garden of paradise, and an angel forbids their return.

The creatures that had been entirely submissive to them now revolt against them, and become occasions of danger and suffering. The earth is cursed with sterility, producing of itself only brambles and thorns.

Henceforth they must till it, for God has said to man: *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.*[1] Sufferings without number are to be their portion until they undergo the greatest of sufferings—death, with which God had threatened them and to which he now condemns them, saying to Adam: *Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.*[1]

How many evils are the consequence of their sin! And yet, these are far from being the only or even the greatest evils. Punished in themselves, Adam and Eve are likewise punished in their descendants, who shall be born children of wrath and enemies of God. To them also heaven is closed, while hell lies open, and the human race will tread the path that leads to it. This world is delivered over to famine, pestilence, war, and all their scourges. Numberless calamities and disasters will crush its wretched inhabitants, making this an abode of suffering, a valley of tears.

Behold what sin has produced! How can we think of all this and not hate sin above all other evils! With what horror the very name of sin should fill us! How can we help feeling a supreme aversion for that monster which has caused so many miseries?

APPLICATION

Let us abhor sin and shun it at every cost. Let us fear nothing so much in the world as sin. Let us flee from it; let us flee from its every occasion. Let us resolutely separate ourselves from everything that can lead to evil.

[1]Gen. iii. 19.

Let us be prudent. Let us not imitate Eve, who listened to the suggestions of the devil, looked at the forbidden fruit, and stretching forth her hand, plucked it and raised it to her lips. When that tempter comes to us, let us resist him vigorously; let us carefully refrain from looking with the eyes of our body or our mind on the object by which he excites our appetite.

Let us do penance for our sins, which are, alas! so numerous and so grievous. How long did not our first parents deplore their fault! Adam expiated it by more than nine hundred years of labor, tears, and sacrifice. Like him, let us, as far as possible, give full satisfaction to the justice of God.

Let us humble ourselves at the thought of the sin of Adam and Eve, by which we have lost all our greatness in the natural order; but let us above all humble ourselves at the thought of our own sins. O how much more guilty are we than they! They committed one sin; they committed it before the redemption, and when they had little knowledge of the effects of divine justice; and soon after committing it they repented of it and they atoned for it by long and rigorous penance. Our sins, however, are numerous, committed with malice, in the presence of the cross; committed in soul and body which have been sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ; committed in spite of God's threats and our knowledge of the severity of his judgments. Moreover, we offer little or no expiation; perhaps, indeed, we have no sincere regret for our sins.

Let us henceforth amend our course. Children of an erring father, let us weep with him and for him, and for ourselves. Let us embrace the practice of penance,

and obtain from the God whom we have offended both pardon for sin and restoration to the state of happiness from which we have fallen.

PRAYER

O Jesus, who far from abandoning man when he became a sinner, didst give thyself up to atone for his offences, remember thy mission of mercy and complete it in my behalf. Deliver me from the power of the devil; strengthen me against his attacks. With the help of thy grace I will have but one wish, and that is to be restored to thy favor and persevere in thy holy love. This I beg of thee, in the name of Mary, thy sinless Mother, the second Eve, who repaired the fault of the first, and to whose intercession thou canst refuse nothing.

Résumé, page 317.

Let us consider the nature and the effects of the sin of Adam and Eve:

1. Created in innocence, our first parents were happy.
2. God gave them a commandment easy to keep.
3. But the devil seduced Eve, who ate of the forbidden fruit, and drew Adam into her sin.
4. What a sin! It contained imprudence, weakness, pride, disobedience, sensuality, and contempt of God.
5. Hence, how deplorable have been and still are its consequences!

—Being mindful of them, let us comprehend:

1. That sin causes only torments.
2. That the devil is false to his promises.
3. But that God is faithful in his menaces.
4. That at any cost we must avoid sin.
5. That we must deplore the sins which we have committed, and do fitting penance for them.

FOURTH MEDITATION

THE MALICE OF MORTAL SIN

Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making a mockery of him.—Heb. vi. 6.

CONSIDERATION

Who can adequately deplore the evil of mortal sin? Let us remember that it is a deliberate revolt of man against God, a direct insult to all his perfections. It is a contempt of God, his graces and his promises, an abuse of his favors, a violation of our most sacred engagements, a renewal of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and a sacrilegious outrage to his divine heart. It is a deliberate disobedience of the law of God in a matter of importance. Whoever commits it shares the sentiments of the rebel angel when he said: *"I will not serve,* I will not obey."

Can a greater violation of order be conceived? The highest heaven with its millions of angels is perfectly submissive to God. The lower heaven, with its countless stars, this world and all the creatures that compose or beautify it, faithfully execute his holy will. Man, man alone disturbs this admirable harmony, and dares say with full deliberation, "I will not obey!"

But who art thou, then, that risest against God? What art thou of thyself but misery and nothingness?

And is it thou, dust and ashes, a leaf that is the sport of the wind, a vapor that quickly passes out of sight, that raisest thy will against his? On one side stands he who possesses all power, all wisdom, and all justice, who says, "Do this"; and on the other art thou, who art all weakness, ignorance and error, and thou answerest, "I will not." What a horrible crime! What an insult to our Sovereign Master! What a defiance of his authority and his supreme dominion!

Mortal sin offends the sanctity of God to which it is directly opposed; his justice, which it dares; his wisdom, of which it makes no account; his goodness, which it abuses; his immensity and power, from whose control it would escape. He who commits it would wish that God could neither see nor punish him; that he was destitute of immensity, of authority, of power; that is to say, that he was not God. Hence the statement of St. Bernard, that sin, as far as possible, annihilates God.

Mortal sin outrages God in his titles of Creator, Lawgiver, Rewarder and Avenger, Redeemer, King, Father and Friend. He who commits it denies him his sovereign dominion, resists his orders, despises his rewards and threats, annuls, in his own regard, the merits of Jesus Christ, acts as if independent of him, and deeply wounds that heart that entertains for man no feelings but those of goodness, tenderness, and boundless love.

Mortal sin outrages God the Father by profaning the supernatural life which we received in baptism, and by which we share in the divine nature. It outrages God the Son by renewing his passion, trampling his

blood under our feet, and enabling his enemies to triumph over him. It outrages God the Holy Ghost by profaning his temple, banishing him from a heart in which he dwelt, and opposing the inspirations and lights of grace.

Mortal sin is a preference of the creature to the Creator: *To whom have you likened me, and made me equal?*[1] says God to those who commit it. *Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth; I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me.*[2] *They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*[3]

Placed between God and the creature, the sinner prefers the latter to God! Having to choose between supreme felicity and a false and transient joy, he gives the latter his preference. The object of a vile passion is esteemed above the infinite Good! A miserable pleasure is more prized than infinite happiness! The devils take the place of God, and it is to them that the soul sacrifices itself on the desecrated altar of its heart.

Is it, then, credible that there are men capable of such blindness, knowing, moreover, that what God asks of them is not above their strength and is intended to secure their own happiness; that he helps them by his grace to keep his law; and that by resisting him they merit hell, with its everlasting fire and despair?

Mortal sin is stamped with the deepest ingratitude. It is a direct and grievous offence against the tenderest of Fathers, to whom we owe everything, who loves us

[1]Isai. xlvi. 5. [2]Isai. i. 2. [3]Jer. ii. 13.

beyond our power to conceive, and who proves his love by heaping his favors upon us in the order of nature and in that of grace. Of these favors we not only make no account, but even turn them from their end; we abuse them so far as to employ them against the Giver! What detestable ingratitude!

O sinners, remember how you treat God, who has been so good to you. Could you be more indifferent to his claims if you had received nothing from him, if he were a stranger to you? What idea of mortal sin should such considerations give you? And you have not yet considered it in its relations to Jesus Christ. Remember that it is directly opposed to him, and as far as sinners can do so, destroys his work of redemption, and annuls his merits. Remember that it calls forth his tears, that it deeply wounds his loving heart and renews his passion.

O Jesus, adorable Victim, thy love fastened thee to the cross, and made thee shed for our salvation the last drop of thy blood; and we sinners profane this blood, and, like the Jews, pass before thy cross, heaping insults upon thee. Rather we become thy executioners; for, says the apostle, speaking of sinners, *they crucify again to themselves the Son of God, and make a mockery of him.*[1]

APPLICATION

Nothing whatever should inspire in our hearts so much hatred and aversion as mortal sin; and if we have committed it, nothing should so excite both our

[1]Heb. vi. 6.

tears and our sorrow, for there is nothing more odious, more deplorable, and more dishonorable.

Let us be well convinced of this, and instil the same conviction into the souls entrusted to our charge. Let us fill their minds with a horror of mortal sin, and for this purpose make use of catechisms, exhortations, reflections, everything at our disposal, taking care above all to avoid on our part every shadow of sin.

Let us think of the dangers that we run from the three concupiscences within us; let us watch and pray that we may escape the snares of the enemy of our salvation. Let us prevent the evil in its beginning, carefully avoiding small faults, taking all the precautions prescribed by our rules, withdrawing resolutely from everything that could be an occasion of sin to us and lead us into the paths of iniquity, conformably to those words of Jesus Christ: *If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. It is better for thee with one eye to enter into life than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.*[1]

Let us humble ourselves at the remembrance of the sins we have committed, many of which perhaps were mortal. Let us, with the penitent saints, bewail our misfortune in offending God, and hasten to return to a loving Father who is always disposed to pardon us. Let us, by our return to virtue, console the heart of Jesus, which we have grieved, and to which nothing causes more joy than a true conversion.

[1]Matt. xviii. 9.

PRAYER

Thou hast made me understand, O my God, what an evil is mortal sin. O grant by thy grace that I may never more commit it. Make me avoid its occasions, and thus prevent it at its source, for I desire to establish myself in justice, and persevere therein. May I thus make myself agreeable in thy eyes and obtain mercy on the day when I shall appear before thee.

Résumé, page 318.

How odious is mortal sin! It is:

1. A voluntary and deliberate revolt of man against God, of him who is nothing against him who is all.
2. A direct offence to all the perfections of God; it is contempt of God, contempt of his graces and his promises.
3. An abuse of his benefits, going so far as to turn them against him.
4. A violation of the most sacred engagements.
5. A sacrilegious outrage to the Heart of Jesus.

—Yes, mortal sin is the supreme evil:

1. Let us, then, conceive the most lively horror of it.
2. Let us inspire therewith the souls who are confided to us.
3. Let us never commit it.
4. Let us sacrifice all to avoid it.
5. Let us prevent it in its origin, and carefully avoid its occasions.

FIFTH MEDITATION

THE EFFECTS OF MORTAL SIN

Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin.—John viii. 34.

CONSIDERATION

Let us judge of mortal sin as God himself judges of it, for he, in his infinite wisdom, although all-merciful, yet punishes in a terrible manner those who are guilty of it. Let us judge of it by its effects, for the tree is known by its fruits. What, then, are the fruits of mortal sin?

What a sad picture is presented by the evils which it has brought in its train, and which it still continues to bring! A multitude of angels are guilty of it in heaven, and forthwith these spirits, so beautiful, so perfect, and called to a destiny so glorious, are cast into the depths of hell, where their only portion is sorrow, misery, ignominy and despair.

Adam and Eve commit it in the earthly paradise, and God subjects them to labor, suffering, the miseries of life and death, and makes all their posterity sharers in their misfortunes. Mortal sin called down upon earth the waters of the deluge, and the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; it raised God's arm against Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, and many other cities

that have been ruined in punishment of their crimes. Mortal sin was the true cause of all the sufferings inflicted on the adorable Victim who died for us on Calvary. O how great an evil must it then be! The Son of God, the Holy of holies, assumes the responsibility of atoning for it, and behold his Father crushes him by his justice, giving him up to a most cruel and ignominious death.

Let us now consider the effects of mortal sin on the guilty soul. When this soul was still innocent it was beautiful in the eyes of God, who beheld in it his own likeness. He was its Father, Spouse, Friend, and Guide. It was in peace with itself and triumphed over the devil. It was rich in the gifts of grace, and worthy to be placed with the angels in eternal happiness. How admirable, then, was its condition!

But it ceases to watch over itself and tampers with danger; it falls into mortal sin; and at that very instant what a horrible change takes place in its relations with God! What a picture of ruin it presents to him who beholds it with the eyes of faith!

God no longer sees in it any resemblance to himself; it is to him an object of horror. It is stripped of its beauty and its glory. It is no longer the daughter of the Father, the spouse of the Son, the temple of the Holy Ghost: it has become the slave of the devil. That malicious spirit has usurped the place of Jesus Christ, and sits enthroned in its heart, while the Divine Master, whom it has abandoned, mourns over its fate.

For it peace is no longer possible! In place of the holy liberty which it previously enjoyed it submits to the most oppressive and humiliating slavery; for the

devil holds it enchained by shameful fetters; the world and its passions are its masters; remorse gnaws at its vitals; it lives in terror and alarm, and even on earth suffers a species of hell.

O sinful soul, what tears of pity thy condition should call forth! O daughter of Zion, what has become of thy beauty! I see thee humbled, with thy face in the dust, and trampled beneath the feet of thy enemies. Nothing is left of all thy former glory. Yesterday thou wast a queen, and to-day thou art a miserable slave to the most cruel and hateful of tyrants. In thee are accomplished the words of St. Paul: *Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil.*[1] Frightful misery will be thy inheritance, the just wages of thy iniquity.

Mortal sin strips the soul of all its merits for heaven, and so long as it retains possession prevents the soul from acquiring any more. Let us suppose a religious soul dedicated for many years to the service of him who does not suffer a glass of cold water given in his name to go without its reward. What a number of good works must that soul have done! To what privations must it not have subjected itself; and consequently what treasures must it not have accumulated for the next life! But let it commit only one mortal sin, and all its treasures are lost! It was a fruitful vineyard, giving joyful hopes to the cultivator; but a storm came upon it and laid it waste. It was a magnificent city, but fire reduced it to ashes. It was a vessel entering the harbor with a rich cargo, but a tempest arose and sunk it in the deep. To it may be

[1] Rom. ii. 9.

addressed the words of the Apocalypse: *Thou sayest: I am wealthy, and I have need of nothing; and thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*[1]

Not only has it nothing, but unless it returns to the state of grace, it cannot even merit anything for heaven. Whatever good it may do cannot be counted for eternity. St. Paul says: *If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor . . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*[2] The soul in mortal sin is in a state of death, and all its works are dead, and without value for heaven.

The Holy Ghost has said by the mouth of Ezechiel: *The soul that sinneth, the same shall die.*[3] These words are verified in the sinner. "The body lives," says St. Augustine, "but the soul is dead. The noblest part is destroyed; the house is left standing, but the inmate lies dead within." "O Christian," adds he, "there is no feeling in your heart, if, weeping over the body from which the soul has departed, you do not weep still more bitterly over the soul forsaken by God."

Finally let us consider the consequences of mortal sin in the next life. If a man be guilty of it at the moment when he is struck down by death, all is lost for him. For him Jesus Christ is only an irritated Judge, who pronounces the sentence of damnation: "Depart, thou cursed one, into everlasting fire."

The unfortunate soul is at once plunged into the abyss of that fire in which all sufferings are centered; where nothing is heard but howls of rage and cries of despair, where the most absolute disorder reigns, where

[1]Apoc. iii. 17. [2]1 Cor. xiii. 3. [3]Ezech. xviii. 20.

for all eternity the soul has no other prospect than that of unending suffering.

Let us contemplate Jesus Christ on Calvary, and a soul in hell, and then ask ourselves what kind of evil is mortal sin.

APPLICATION

Let us fear and abhor mortal sin; we can never fear or abhor it as much as it deserves. Let us fear it more than the loss of worldly goods, of honor, health, and life. To avoid it, let us adopt all the precautions prescribed to us; let us flee from its occasions at every cost. Let us never tamper with what might involve us in so great a misfortune.

Let us bewail the unhappiness of those who are guilty of it. Let us pray for their return to grace, and, as far as obedience allows us, let us labor with zeal for their conversion, remembering that it is written: *He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death.*[1]

Let us do penance for our sins, and let us bless God for having shown us mercy. Let us repeat in a spirit of compunction and gratitude: *I have sinned, and indeed I have offended; and I have not received what I have deserved.*[2] *I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart; and I will glorify thy name forever; for thy mercy is great towards me, and thou hast delivered my soul out of the lower hell.*[3]

Yes, let us bless God, and remember that it is

[1]Jas. v. 20. [2]Job. xxxiii. 27.
[3]Ps. lxxxv. 12, 13.

through his infinite goodness that we ourselves have been saved from hell.

PRAYER

O my God, who hast shown me the fatal effects of mortal sin, grant that I may never more commit it. Penetrate my heart and soul with horror for it. Grant that I may persevere in thy grace, and thus merit by thy mercy to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven where nothing defiled can enter. I ask thee this favor by the merits of the sufferings of Jesus and through the intercession of his most holy Mother.

Résumé, page 318.

What fatal effects mortal sin produces!

1. It pollutes the soul and renders it abominable in the sight of God.
2. It betrays it to the devil who thenceforth reigns in it in place of Jesus Christ.
3. For it peace is no longer possible!
4. By it no more merits can be gained for heaven, at least until it forsakes the state of sin.
5. For it remain hell and its horrors, if death surprises it in enmity with God.

—Can we then sufficiently,

1. Fear and abhor mortal sin?
2. Take precautions to avoid it?
3. Deplore the unhappy state of those who are guilty of it?
4. Do penance for all the sins which we have committed?
5. Implore the grace of persevering in justice?

SIXTH MEDITATION

THE LOSS OF GOD

My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily: where is thy God?—Psalms xli. 4.

CONSIDERATION

Mortal sin makes us lose God: how, then, can we sufficiently deplore having committed it! O sinners, how much reason have you to say with the Psalmist, *My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily: where is thy God?* What a loss is yours, how great is your misfortune! God is goodness in its essence, source, and fullness, the wellspring of all pure pleasures, the ocean of all true joys. He is the bread that nourishes the soul, the fountain of living water that quenches its thirst, the light that illumines it, the raiment with which it is clothed, the voice that guides it. He is its support, its consolation, its guide, its protector, its king, its savior, its father and spouse. Created for him, the soul can find no repose but in him: he is its end, its happiness, its peace. He is its only good. To lose him, therefore, is to lose everything; it is to experience the greatest of misfortunes, the justest cause for tears. To lose God is to pass from the greatest affluence to the most absolute poverty. O soul, now stained by mortal sin, thou wast

rich in the gifts of grace, and fit to appear with the angels before the throne of the Most High. Thou didst enjoy the sweetest happiness; thou didst want for nothing from the heavenly Father, so good, so rich, so generous. What has become of these inestimable advantages? In thee pure gold is changed into lead; and no misery, no poverty can reveal the degree of misery and poverty to which thou hast sunk.

We pity the orphan left destitute, the leper whose disease eats away his flesh, the man struck by blindness, deafness, or paralysis; but why do we not feel greater compassion for the soul that has lost God? Are not all these evils its own, since it has lost God its father, its light, its strength, and its life?

To lose God is to fall from the highest of dignities to the lowest depths of disgrace. The soul that possesses God is adorned with his glory, and shines with his beauty. It is in the eyes of faith incomparably lovely; being clothed with the heavenly mantle of charity, it has the insignia of true nobility. It is the beloved of the Sovereign King, it has been called to reign with him, and has already been placed on the highest step of the throne prepared for it.

But when it has the misfortune to lose God, how suddenly its condition is changed! It becomes hideous and frightful to look upon. The angelic beauty of its countenance has vanished, and given place to a resemblance to the devil. It is vile and dishonorable. A disgraceful brand is on its forehead; the mark of the beast has taken the place of the sign of the Lamb of God. Its vesture is a robe of ignominy. The angels turn away their eyes from such an object worthy of

the contempt of Satan himself, the most contemptible of all God's creatures.

Yesterday it climbed the steps of a throne; to-day it lies in the most abject misery. Such, indeed, is its humiliation that it would be a frightful punishment to realize the degradation to which it has sunk. It dares not reflect on it; it feels that it has lost all dignity, all right to the esteem of others. From a child of God it has become a slave of the devil. It has passed from the gentlest of sways to the most cruel oppression. It was free, and now it is bent beneath the most tyrannical of yokes.

Another Esau, it has sold its birthright for a miserable gratification, and renounced its inheritance. Like the prodigal, it has left its Father's house, and, under its new master, is now obliged to feed swine whose very food it envies them.

Is that all? No; for the soul that has lost God has exchanged the joys of heaven for the torments of hell. Before it fell into sin it had a right to infinite happiness. A place was reserved for it among the saints and the angels of God. Had it but persevered, it would eventually have attained to this. It would have been admitted to the land where happiness flows in torrents, where all gold and precious stones abound, where the choirs of the heavenly hosts sing in sublime harmony the praises of the Lamb.

But by its sin it has deserved hell. It has prepared for itself a place in those dungeons fashioned by divine justice. It has stamped on its brow the mark of damnation. Let death but come, and its misery is now complete. God, from whom it turned away, will with-

draw from it forever. He will say to it: "Depart from me, accursed one, into everlasting fire." While it is falling into hell it will understand what it is to have lost God. For all eternity the experience of this loss will be its greatest suffering, the source of its bitterest tears and most harrowing regrets.

APPLICATION

Yes, to lose God is the evil which we must fear and dread above all else, the evil in comparison with which all the accidents, calamities, and disasters that can befall us are as nothing. O let us be upon our guard lest we lose God by mortal sin, and let us remember that we dispose ourselves to lose him by deliberate venial sin. On this account, let us avoid every sin. Let us avoid it at every cost, for nothing can compensate for the injury which it does us. Let us prevent it by correcting our imperfections and removing every dangerous occasion.

Let us lament the fate of those souls that have lost God by sin; and should we be of that number, let us deplore our own misfortune. When so many tears are shed over the loss of creatures, what grief would be too great for the loss of the Creator? If the sight of poverty moves us to compassion, what should be our feelings at the sight of a misery infinitely more lamentable?

Let us examine our conscience, to learn whether we are in the state of mortal sin, and have, consequently, lost God. If such be the case, let us lose no time in

regaining his friendship. Let us weep over the state to which we have been reduced by withdrawing our heart from him. Let us beg of him to communicate himself to us anew. Let us seek him by prayer and penance. Let us call on him by our tears and supplications. Let us seek him in solitude, in retreat from the world, and amidst the silence of our passions. Let us seek him in his holy temple, at the feet of his minister to whom he has given power to reconcile us to himself.

Let us detach our hearts from sin by a sincere confession, accompanied by true contrition, and the Lord will again be with us. His presence will bring us a profound peace, a foretaste of the happiness which we shall enjoy on the last day. Then we shall see him as he is; we shall possess him, and be sure of possessing him forever.

PRAYER

I have sinned, and thou hast departed from me, O my God, my only good. Thy presence was my only consolation; I was happy in possessing thee, and now I am in a state of extreme desolation. O Fountain of living water! who will grant that I may quench in thee the thirst that burns my soul! O Jesus, when shall I be able to say: *I found him whom my soul loveth . . . and I will not let him go.*[1] Grant that it be now, at this very moment, and that nothing henceforth may ever separate me from thee.

[1]Cant. iii. 4.

Résumé, page 318.

What a misfortune it is to lose God!

1. To lose God is to pass from the most complete affluence to the most frightful indigence.

2. To lose God is to fall from the height of honor into the most degrading opprobrium.

3. To lose God is to cease to be his child and to become a slave of the devil.

4. To lose God is to exchange profound peace for grave disquietude, entire comfort for absolute desolation.

5. To lose God is to renounce the joys of heaven for the horrors of hell.

—We must, then,

1. Fear and dread that supreme misfortune above all else.

2. Avoid sin, which is its cause.

3. Pity those souls who have strayed from God.

4. Examine if we are not of their number.

5. In that case, hasten to return to him, that we may never more be separated from him.

SEVENTH MEDITATION

VENIAL SIN

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.—1 John i. 8.

CONSIDERATION

Let us consider what an evil venial sin is; how severely God condemns it, how much it grieves the heart of Jesus, and what its consequences are in this life and in the next.

Venial sin of whatever kind is an offence against God, comprising to some extent a contempt of God, an insult to his perfections, and a preference of the creature to the Creator. Therefore, no misfortune that can befall us is to be compared with it, for nothing finite can sufficiently atone for it. Not even all angels and all men with all their merits could ever make adequate satisfaction.

Supposing, therefore, that by one venial sin it were possible to prevent the greatest temporal evils, such as war, famine, and pestilence, all the doctors of the Church, and particularly St. Augustine, teach that it would not be justifiable to commit that sin. Suppose even that by incurring the guilt of one venial sin a multitude of souls might be saved, and all the souls in

purgatory released, even then not one single sin would be justified. Great as these blessings are, they are still finite, and refer only to the creature; whilst sin, even though venial, is an infinite evil because of the offence which it gives to God.

Although we frequently look upon venial sin as a small matter, God judges very differently. This we may learn from the chastisements with which he punishes it. Lot's wife, in spite of the prohibition of the angels, looks back upon the burning of Sodom, and she is immediately changed into a pillar of salt. Moses, the greatest of the prophets, by striking the rock twice, shows distrust in the goodness of God toward the people of Israel, and he is condemned never to enter the promised land. The Bethsamites look with curiosity upon the Ark of the Covenant, and fifty thousand of them are struck dead. David, through vanity, takes a census of his people, and God sends a pestilence which in three days carries off seventy thousand persons. Oza, forgetting that he had no right to do so, touches the Ark of the Covenant to prevent it from falling, and he is instantly struck dead. What, then, must venial sin be in the eyes of God, since he punishes it so terribly even in this world which he visits so generously with his mercy?

He punishes it far more in the life to come, where he exercises all the rigors of his justice. Let us remember that the souls in purgatory are adorned with grace; that they are his beloved to whom he intends to communicate himself without reserve. Yet because he sees venial sin in them, he banishes them from his presence; he shuts them up in a dark prison, in an

abyss of fire, where they suffer tortures beyond our power to imagine. Could we hear their groans and lamentations, could we understand their ardent desire to see God, could we see the flames that surround and penetrate them, what would we think of venial sin? Let us, then, entertain a true horror of it, for it is in truth horrible in the eyes of the thrice holy God, and therefore it provokes his justice.

But besides the punishments that it merits, what sad effects does it not produce in the soul that deliberately consents to incur its guilt! Without destroying in it all resemblance to God, it strips it of its beauty, and covers it, as it were, with ulcers. It lessens the divine love which is the strength of the soul, and leaves it languid, sick, and without energy to do good. To a certain extent it always hinders the operation of grace; it clouds the understanding, rouses the passions, increases concupiscence, and inclines the will to evil.

Without bringing down the full enmity of God, it causes a coolness toward him, and provokes him to withdraw his spiritual consolations. Before committing this fault, the soul lived in filial intimacy with God. After committing it it fears him more and loves him less; it finds prayer more painful and acts of charity more difficult.

Venial sin weakens our love for Jesus Christ, which it also proves to have been already very weak. True love aims to please the object of its affections even in small things, and to avoid everything that could give offense. Now, when we commit venial sin, we are far from acting according to these principles. We virtually say to Jesus Christ: "I do not wish to inflict a mortal

wound upon thy heart; but nevertheless I wish to do what will afflict thee very deeply." Is that the language of love? Is not he, who by his conduct gives expression to such sentiments, very near to having no love at all for his divine Savior?

Let us finally consider how deliberate venial sin leads naturally and insensibly to mortal sin. It prepares the soul for it as sickness prepares the body for death. It diminishes the horror for mortal sin and soon removes it entirely. In general, it is only gradually man falls into mortal sin; he goes from an imperfection to a fault, from that to a greater one, and finally he consents to mortal sin. It is, then, towards this abyss that those are hurrying who commit deliberate venial sins.

How many have fallen into grievous sin, almost without perceiving it! Sometimes, so far as the conscience can judge, there is little distance between venial sin and mortal sin. Who, then, can feel assured, when he commits deliberate venial sin, or promises himself that he will not cross the dividing line, that he has not really consented to mortal sin? Who dare affirm that a certain fault, which he calls venial, is not mortal? How many cases are there not in which even the most learned theologians cannot draw the distinction?

It is evident, then, that he who often falls deliberately into venial sin stands upon very uncertain ground, and is guilty of grave imprudence in his conduct. Let us remember that the great majority of the damned can trace their ruin back to venial sins that gradually led to such as were mortal, according to these words of

our Divine Lord: *He that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater.*[1]

APPLICATION

Let us fear venial sin, whose consequences are truly lamentable. Let us fear it the more because it naturally inspires less horror, and because the occasions of committing it are more frequent. David said: *My iniquities . . . are multiplied above the hairs of my head.*[2] Can we not say this with greater reason? How many sins of ignorance, inadvertence, frailty and imprudence do we not commit every day! To what, according to God's justice, does such a multitude of sins make us liable?

Let us avoid venial sins with the greatest care, and if we cannot keep ourselves entirely free from them, let us at least diminish their number. Let us shun the occasions of sin. We know how weak we are: let us then not expose ourselves to the danger of failing in our duties. Let us so watch over our conduct as to make it more closely conformed to the law which we ought to follow. Let us sincerely repent of all our sins, whatever they may be. Let us repent of them from the bottom of our heart at all times, but especially when we approach the Sacrament of Penance.

The saints have bitterly lamented all their lives the commission of faults that were often very venial; let us imitate them. Like them, let us do penance for our venial sins; for those which we know and for those of which we are ignorant, for the latter are more numer-

[1]Luke xvi. 10. [2]Ps. xxxix. 13.

ous. With a view to atone for all our faults, let us accept, at least with resignation, the sufferings of this life. Let us never forget that it is better to suffer our purgatory in this world, where chiefly God's mercy is known, than in the next, where he gives free rein to his justice.

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus, who camest to destroy sin, grant that it may no longer abide in me. Give me a delicate and rigorous conscience that dreads even the shadow of evil and pardons nothing in itself. It will cost me, I know, many struggles, but can I purchase too dearly the double advantage of offending thee less and of saving my soul?

Résumé, page 319.

Let us beware of thinking that venial sin is not a great evil.

1. It offends God, it is an insult to God.
2. How often has not God punished it in a terrible manner! Remember Lot's wife, Moses, Oza!
3. With what rigor does he not punish it in the other life!
4. Moreover, what fatal effects does not venial sin produce even in this life!
5. Let us reflect that it leads naturally and almost insensibly to mortal sin.

—Wherefore, following the example and the recommendations of the saints:

1. Let us fear and dread even its appearance.
2. Let us avoid it with the greatest care.
3. Let us shun its occasions.
4. Let us repent sincerely of those which we have committed.
5. Let us be particularly attentive to this point, when we receive the sacrament of penance.

EIGHTH MEDITATION

SIN IN A CHRISTIAN

If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it: but thou, a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar.—Psalms liv. 13, 14.

CONSIDERATION

In whoever commits it, sin is always odious; but it is far more hateful in a Christian than in an infidel. The latter, by sinning, becomes more fully the slave of Satan, obeying him under whose dominion he is already enlisted; the former is a child of God who revolts against his Father, a member of Jesus Christ who dishonors his august Head, a disciple of the Divine Master who denies him by his conduct. A temple of the Holy Ghost profaned, defiled and thrown open to the service of the devil; a child of the Church deeply afflicting his loving Mother; a soldier of God's army treacherously going over to the ranks of the enemy—such is the Christian who is guilty of sin. What conduct can be more unworthy of his calling? What more calculated to provoke the anger of God and call down his vengeance?

A Christian is a child of God by grace and adoption. He was born a child of wrath, but God in pity showed him mercy, received him into his friendship,

and restored to him his right to heaven. Yet, after such favors, the Christian dares sin, sin frequently, and sometimes very grievously. He consents to become an enemy of God, to sadden the heart of the most loving of fathers, and to make himself a child of Satan! What terms can adequately express the baseness of such conduct?

Be not deceived, says St. Paul, *God is not mocked.*[1] O Christians, who commit sin, do not persuade yourselves that you mock God, and that you have nothing to fear. Delay not to change your lives and to heed the advice of the apostle: *Walk worthy of God in all things pleasing.*[2] *Be strengthened in the Lord, and in the might of his power.*[3]

A Christian is a member of Jesus Christ, living his life, and stamped with his likeness. *As many of you as have been baptized in Christ,* says St. Paul, *have put on Christ.*[4] *For you are bought with a great price; glorify and bear God in your body.*[5] But if he sins grievously, he dishonors his Divine Head; he deserts his Master, throws down his glorious standard, and takes up the banner of Satan.

The doctrine of Jesus Christ is essentially condemnatory of sin. It requires a perfection superior to that demanded by the old law. The Christian who commits sin contradicts this doctrine. How can he then call himself a disciple of Christ? Does he not deny him by his actions? Does he not oppose his influence? Does he not, as far as depends on man, annul his merits?

Redeemed by the blood of a God, he again stretches

[1]Gal. vi. 7. [2]Col. i. 10. [3]Eph. vi. 10.
[4]Gal. iii. 27. [5]1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

forth his hands to receive the chains of slavery. Declared an heir of heaven, he chooses to inherit hell. Called by his vocation to be a Christian, to work with Christ for the destruction of sin, he labors to rear the edifice of death and to pull down that of virtue, whose foundation stone is the cross.

What grief does he not cause the heart of his loving Savior! O Divine Lamb, after all thou hast done to destroy sin, should it still exist, and exist in the soul of a Christian? Yet it is so; for, O adorable Victim, thou canst show us thy bleeding wounds, and say: "With these was I wounded in the house of them that loved me."

Every Christian is a temple of the Holy Ghost, adorned with grace, resplendent with divine light. But if he commits a grievous sin, he desecrates this temple. Profaned, defiled, it is a meeting place for demons. His heart becomes the throne of the unclean spirit; the abomination of desolation is in the holy place. That soul in which the Divine Spirit was well pleased, now excites his disgust and provokes his indignation.

A Christian is a child of the Church, a member of the spouse of Jesus Christ. Now holiness is one of the distinctive marks of the Church; she is the enemy of sin which she combats unceasingly by every means in her power. The Christian who commits sin is an unworthy child of the Church; he dishonors her and causes her to shed bitter tears. In place of seconding her designs, he opposes them; instead of co-operating in her works of sanctification, he resists them; instead of aiding her mission, he plots her ruin. He is worse than an unnatural child; he is a parricide.

The Christian who commits sin, abuses grace, and assumes a terrible responsibility to the justice of God. What help has he not received to keep him in the path of virtue? The interior promptings of the Holy Ghost, the word of God, the care of God's pastors, virtuous example, confessions, communions, good reading,—nothing has been wanting to him; his conduct is therefore without excuse.

It is also in direct opposition to his most sacred engagements. On the day of his baptism he promised, when receiving the robe of innocence, to keep it unspotted until he should present himself before the tribunal of Jesus Christ. He declared that he renounced Satan and all his works, and that he would live according to the maxims of the Gospel. According to the expression of St. Paul, he was buried with Jesus Christ, to die to sin. He enrolled himself with the soldiers of the Lord to labor with their captain for the destruction of sin and the ruin of the empire of Satan. But by yielding to sin he became a traitor to his engagements. He deserted from the camp of Jesus Christ to enlist under the banner of Satan. What treason! What cowardice! Moreover, what profanation! For every Christian is a member of Jesus Christ, living his life, wearing his livery, and redeemed by his blood; and yet when he sins he wallows in the filth of iniquity. What can be more unworthy of his dignity! What can be more revolting in the eyes of heaven!

APPLICATION

Let us have a horror of sin, which is so entirely opposed to the maxims of which we make profession;

which is so odious in all Christians, so treasonable in souls which like ours have been favored with so many graces and have had so many means at their disposal for persevering in virtue. Let us avoid it even at the cost of the greatest sacrifices. How many Christians have preferred to lose their goods, their honor, their health, their life, rather than offend God! Let us imitate them, since we have the same motives.

Let us recall our past sins, and bewail them. Let us in God's presence lament the many outrages which we have offered him, and ask his pardon for our criminal conduct. Let us arm ourselves beforehand against all that could entice us into sin. Let us be on our guard against our passions, which always tend to draw us into sin. Let us take arms against ourselves, and bring the flesh in subjection to the spirit.

Let us fear the devil and the world which are always laying snares for us, and preparing many temptations to lead us astray. Let us fight against them, armed with the power of Jesus Christ, by the sign of the cross, by prayer, watching and mortification. Let us propose always to act in a manner worthy of our dignity as children of God, members of Jesus Christ, and temples of the Holy Ghost. These are our titles of nobility, and they oblige us to lead a holy and edifying life. Let us be well convinced of this, and prove our conviction by our works.

PRAYER

O Jesus, Divine Lamb, who takest away the sins of the world, pardon me, I beseech thee, all the sins of

which I have been guilty, and by which I have profaned my title of Christian, provoked the anger of thy Father, abused his gifts, wounded thy heart, deserted thy cause, and accomplished the work of the devil.

O how unworthy of a Christian my conduct has been! I acknowledge it in thy presence, and imploring thee to pardon me, I promise to change my life, to avoid carefully sin and its occasions, and to satisfy thy justice for those faults which I have had the misfortune to commit. But, do thou, O Lord, grant me grace to keep these resolutions. This I ask of thee in the name of all that thou hast suffered to destroy sin, and through the intercession of thy sinless Mother.

Résumé, page 319.

How guilty is the Christian who commits sin!

1. A child of God, he revolts against his Father.
2. A member and disciple of Jesus Christ, he dishonors his august Head, and actually denies his divine Master.
3. A temple of the Holy Ghost, he opens his heart to the devil.
4. A child of the Church he makes his mother weep.
5. A soldier of a holy army, he goes over like a traitor to the camp of the enemy, he violates his promises, he tramples under foot the blood of Jesus Christ.

—We must, then, as Christians:

1. Have a horror of sin.
2. Avoid it even at the cost of the greatest sacrifices.
3. Repent sincerely of all that we have committed.
4. Guard against whatever might occasion relapse.
5. Resolve to act always conformably to our dignity as children of God, members of Jesus Christ, and temples of the Holy Ghost.

NINTH MEDITATION

SIN IN A RELIGIOUS

How is the gold become dim?—Lament. iv. 1.

CONSIDERATION

Since the religious state is essentially opposed to sin, whoever embraces it contracts thereby the obligation to avoid evil, to lead a life of perfection, and to labor in union with Jesus Christ to overturn the empire of Satan. But what a contradiction would it be if a religious committed sin! He would be opposed to the very essence of his profession; he would disgrace his title and his habit; he would grievously afflict the Church, and the congregation of which he is a member.

What a responsibility he would incur before God! *That servant,* says Jesus Christ, *who knew the will of his Lord . . . and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*[1] He teaches us then, as the author of the "Imitation" expresses it, that "the more and better thou knowest, the more heavy will be thy judgment unless thy life be also more holy."[2]

Now who has more means of learning his duty and knowing exactly what God requires of him than the religious? Has he not his holy law always before his eyes? Does he not hear it read every day? Is he not

[1]Luke xii. 47, 48. [2]Bk. I. Chap. ii. 2.

daily called to meditate upon it, perhaps even to teach it? Has he not the rules of his holy state to guide him? Do not his superiors instruct him in the code of perfection?

Yes, he knows his duty very well, and consequently he is more guilty if he neglects to do it. Moreover he has not only more light than others as to his duties, but also more abundant means to fulfil them. For he is separated from the world and its seductions; he leads a life of retirement and prayer; he goes to confession and communion frequently; he devotes a considerable portion of his time to spiritual exercises: vocal prayer, mental prayer, particular examen, spiritual reading, general examen, the weekly reddition of conduct, the annual retreat; indeed, he wants nothing to keep him in the path of virtue. How criminal he would then be if in spite of all these means of sanctification he did not become holy, but even allowed himself to fall into sin!

The religious who commits sin seriously dishonors the obligations which he has contracted; for, like every Christian, he promised on the day of his baptism to avoid evil and to live according to the maxims and the example of Jesus Christ. These obligations he has also renewed and to them he has added another, that of walking in the path of the evangelical counsels, of leading a pure life, and of tending constantly to perfection. Therefore he breaks the promise which he has made to God, to the Church, and to his Institute! He is a perjurer.

He is also guilty of sacrilege, because every sin is a profanation of the soul, and the soul of a religious

is doubly consecrated to God! But how great is his guilt if he sins against the vows which he has made!

Let us not deceive ourselves; the holier our state, the more guilty we are if we do not live holily. Therefore St. Bernard tells religious to judge of their faults by the nature of the vocation which they have embraced, adding, that what is a small fault in a secular may be grievous in one who is consecrated to God.

The religious holds a place of distinction in the house of the King of kings, for he is the favorite child of God. Now at all times and in all places the offence of a child against his father is considered more grievous than that committed by a stranger; an insult from one with whom we are on terms of intimacy is more sensibly felt than from one to whom we are less attached. Let us judge by this standard how the sin of a religious wounds the heart of that Divine Master whom he has promised to serve faithfully.

Moreover, this sin almost always involves scandal. *You are the light of the world,* says Jesus Christ to his apostles. *A city that is set on a mountain cannot be hid. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*[1] These words are particularly applicable to every religious. He is placed in a conspicuous position in the Church of Jesus Christ. He is observed of all, and his conduct is closely scrutinized. If he lives virtuously he gives edification and leads souls to God; but if he is careless of his duties, his sin affects many other souls. The good are afflicted at it; many are

[1]Matt. v. 14-16.

shaken in their purpose and find themselves drawn to the path in which he follows. The wicked look upon his conduct as a sanction to continue in their state and inveigle the souls of others.

What can be imagined more injurious to virtue! Is any disorder greater? The salt of the earth spreads corruption; light becomes darkness; he who should guide souls in the way of salvation leads them to perdition; God's messenger discharges the office of the devil!

Yes, it is horrible, and yet this is what a religious does when he consents to sin, and when, as happens frequently, his crime becomes known if not to the world, at least to his community. But whether it is made public or not, his sin is stamped with baser ingratitude than that of persons in the world.

God has been prodigal of his gifts to him. He has chosen him from among a multitude whom he has left in the world. He has anticipated his wants by the most powerful graces and he has communicated himself to him without reserve. He has shared with him the abundance of his house, and has made him the recipient of countless benefits. Can it, then, be possible that one of these souls would turn against him, and insult him by sin? Would not his offence be like that of the angels who rebelled in heaven itself? Of such a soul he might justly complain: *I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have despised me;*[1] or in the words of the Psalmist, *If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it: but thou, a man of one mind, my guide, and my familiar.*[2]

[1]Isai. i. 2. [2]Ps. liv. 13, 14.

O religious who may be tempted to commit sin, give ear to the words of St. Bernard: "Remember the rank which God has given you in his house and the honor which he has done you." Remember that you are the privileged friends of Jesus Christ, the disciples whom he has called nearest to his cross, and to whom he opens all the treasures of his heart. Remember that he invites you often to his sacred banquet, where he feeds you with his own flesh and blood. Can you for a miserable pleasure consent to offend him? After being admitted to his table, would you dare turn your back upon him? After witnessing his sacrifice on the cross, would you join his enemies and aggravate his sufferings?

APPLICATION

As Christians, and still more as religious, let us strive to show the most marked opposition to sin. Let us destroy it in ourselves, and, as far as we can, destroy it also in our neighbor. Let us never commit it; let us avoid even the smallest faults. Let us be on our guard against everything that could lead us into sin.

Let us exercise vigilance and foresight, to keep from sin the children confided to our care. Let us often ask this grace of our Lord. What a service we shall render our pupils if we preserve them from every stain of sin!

At the thought of our own sins, let us excite our hearts to true contrition. Let us weep over our misfortune in offending God, who has so loved and blessed

us. But let us go with confidence to him, for his mercy is infinite, and he is the more disposed to pardon us the dearer we are in his sight.

PRAYER

O Jesus, who pointest to the wound in thy heart, I tremble to think that it is I who have made it by my sins. Yet I dare to feel confidence when I remember that from this wound came forth the last drops of that redeeming blood through which all sinners may ask and obtain mercy. Deign to purify me by the blood and water that streamed from thy heart, and to preserve me in thy grace till thou shalt call me to meet thee in the next life.

Résumé, page 320.

What a disorder it is for a religious to commit sin!

Compared with the same fault in a secular, that of the religious shows:

1. More forgetfulness of duty.
2. More abuse of grace.
3. More breach of promise.
4. More scandal, more sacrilege, for he is doubly consecrated to God.
5. More ingratitude, for he has received special blessings from God.

—As religious, let us be absolutely opposed to sin.

1. Let us have a supreme horror of it.
2. Let us never commit it.
3. Let us avoid even the slightest faults.
4. Let us weep over our past sins, and do penance for them.
5. Let us never cease to labor with Jesus Christ to destroy sin.

TENTH MEDITATION

RELAPSE INTO SIN

Add not sin upon sin.—Eccles. v. 5.

CONSIDERATION

How many times do we not relapse into the same faults, and thus add sin to sin! Let us lament it, saying, with the author of the "Imitation," "O how great is human frailty, which is always prone to vice! To-day thou confessest thy sins, and to-morrow thou again committest what thou hast confessed. Now thou resolvest to take care, and an hour after thou dost as if thou hadst never resolved. We have reason, therefore, to humble ourselves and never to think much of ourselves since we are so frail and inconstant."[1]

Let us humble ourselves, since our weakness is so great. Alas! we seem to rise only to fall again! How little we understand the grievousness of our sins of relapse, the anguish which they cause the heart of Jesus, the loss which they occasion us, and the evils which they prepare for us in soul and body!

Sins of relapse deeply grieve our divine Savior, and call forth such tears as he shed over faithless Jerusalem that knew not the time of her visitation. Why indeed did our Lord come upon earth, if not to destroy the

[1]Bk. I. Chap. xxii. 6.

empire of sin, to make grace abound where iniquity had abounded, to check men on their way to perdition and to set them on the road to salvation and happiness? Nothing, then, is more pleasing to him than to see the end of his divine mission accomplished. What joy does he not experience when by his grace a sinner is converted! He himself tells us that there is then great joy in heaven.

But on the other hand what sorrow does he not feel when that soul falls back into sin; when the captive that he had freed by his courage and devotedness, abandons him to return to his chains; when the lost sheep, that had been found and brought to the fold, strays a second time; when the prodigal son that had been received with open arms and heartfelt joy, again quits his Father's house, and causes by his departure a sorrow greater than was the joy of his return.

By relapsing into sin we deeply wound the heart of Jesus Christ; we even become his executioners. *The wicked,* he says by the mouth of the prophet, *have lengthened their iniquity.*[1] We strike him where we had already struck him; we reopen the wounds which we had already inflicted. What an insult! What cruelty!

The relapse by which we thus wound the heart of Jesus is often a sign that we did not sincerely repent of our offense. It gives strong reason to doubt the genuineness of our contrition. How, indeed, is it credible that we said from the bottom of our hearts: "I have sinned, O my Savior, but I repent. Pardon me in thy mercy"; if, on the first occasion we commit the same fault, and commit it so easily? Whoever is

[1] Ps. cxxviii. 3.

really displeased with an action does not readily repeat it. The true mark of repentance is to abstain from the evil which we deplore.

Relapse into sin is a sign that we lack strength against ourselves, that we are under the sway of our passions, that we suffer our heart to be ruled by the spirit of evil. It shows not only that we are not advancing towards perfection, but even that we are going back in the spiritual life. Let us reflect on this, since as religious we ought to tend to perfection, and form ourselves more and more to the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is holiness itself.

Sins of relapse aggravate our guilt both because of their number and of their increasing grievousness. How many times have we not committed such an offence against God?—ten times? perhaps even a hundred times? How criminal, then, we become by thus repeating the fault! Moreover, it is certain that, other things being equal, a second sin of a given kind is more grievous than the first, a third more grievous than the second, and so on. What, then, must be our guilt, since we have committed the same sin so many times? Alas! why do we thus heap coals upon our heads to feed the fires of divine justice?

Sins of relapse beget a habit of sin, and lead to blindness of heart. The first sin excites remorse, inspires hatred, covers us with confusion, disturbs the soul, which, in that state of suffering easily gives entrance to grace. But if the soul resists grace, if it commits the same sin again, it feels less remorse and offers more opposition to grace. The third sin aggravates these conditions and soon, alas! the soul feels

neither remorse nor shame; it has contracted the habit of the sin.

Here, then, is the woe of woes! The habit of sin is the state in which the soul feels a need of offending God, of dragging him in the dust, of drinking the poison of iniquity; a need of satisfying an insatiable passion, of obeying Satan, afflicting God's angels, and piercing the heart of Jesus! Habit is a second nature. Hence the habit of sin is a state in which man sins, as it were, naturally, by instinct. The habit of sin is a terrible bondage, one from which it requires great efforts to free oneself. It is an impetuous torrent increasing in power as it advances to the sea, and becoming every moment more difficult to control.

The habit of sin implies the dominion of the passions and of the devil over the soul; it means subjection to the most cruel and the most odious form of tyranny. The unclean spirit, driven out by the strong-armed man, has returned to the house with seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and made the last condition of that soul worse than the first; for he subjects it to himself, he leads it hither and thither at his pleasure, and finally drags it into the abyss of iniquity. How many persons have sacrificed to a habit of sin repose, honor, health, and life itself!

What an evil then, O my God, is this habit of repeatedly offending thee! Nothing is more debasing, nothing more lamentable! Sins of relapse make the soul more and more insensible to the influence of thy grace and the pleadings of thy mercy. They lead step by step to hardness of heart, and then, unless prevented by a miracle of thy goodness, to final impenitence.

APPLICATION

Let us dread relapse into sin and adopt the means to prevent it if we have our salvation at heart. Let us avoid dangerous occasions; we know them by experience, let us keep ourselves far from them. Let us do penance for all our sins, and above all for those which we commit most frequently. Let us take arms against ourselves, proportioning our rigor to the number of our transgressions, and increasing it as they increase.

Let us profit by our faults to learn not only our frailty, but also our tendencies, the nature of our temptations and of our ruling passion. At the thought of our sins of relapse let us profoundly humble ourselves, for, alas! they afford certain proof that we are only weakness, malice, and inconstancy; but let us take care not to be discouraged. Let us remember that Jesus Christ fell three times on the road to Calvary. With him, and by his aid, let us arise and walk in his footsteps.

Let us listen to him as he says to us: "My son, lose not the hope of advancing in virtue. Thou hast yet time; behold, now is the acceptable time." Let us comply with those words which the author of the "Imitation" puts into his mouth: "Behold the favorable moment to amend thy ways." Let us take advantage of it, and from this instant renounce every sin and give ourselves resolutely to God forever.

PRAYER

I have sinned so much, would I dare sin again? Can I possibly wish to offend thee again, O my Jesus? Could I fall again into those faults, the memory of which grieves my heart and covers me with shame? No, my divine Savior; no, I will never more displease thee. I am thine, wholly thine. Receive me in thy mercy, among thy servants, and grant by thy grace that I may persevere till death in thy holy love.

Résumé, page 320.

How often unhappily do we not relapse into the same faults!

—O that we could understand the real malice of sins of relapse!

1. They desolate the heart of Jesus.
2. They give reason to doubt the sincerity of our contrition.
3. They aggravate our guilt by their number. Moreover, the second sin is more grievous than the first, the third than the second.
4. They make us contract a habit of sin, which afterwards exercises a frightful tyranny upon the soul.
5. They weaken remorse and lead to hardness of heart.

—It is necessary, then:

1. To fear them, to avoid them.
2. To shun their occasions.
3. To punish ourselves for those which we are so unfortunate as to commit.
4. To attack energetically and resist constantly the ruling passion from which they emanate.
5. Not to be discouraged. However great our relapses may be, we can, by grace, always correct ourselves.

ELEVENTH MEDITATION

THE PRODIGAL SON

A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me.—Luke xv. 11, 12.

CONSIDERATION

Let us meditate on this parable which is so full of salutary lessons and so well fitted to make us understand the evil of sin, and God's love, goodness and mercy to man.

The two sons of whom Jesus Christ speaks, represent the just and sinners: the just who are united with God, who love him, and enjoy his company and receive his blessings; and sinners who, from a spirit of independence and a love of pleasure, depart from him, follow their evil inclinations, abuse their faculties, and degrade themselves below the level of beasts.

It is the younger son who asks for his inheritance; a circumstance which teaches us that the will of the sinner is extravagant and foolish. For what is lacking in his Father's house, where he may dwell as long as he preserves his innocence? Does he not find with thee, O God, peace, plenty, and joy? Whence, then, can the thought of leaving thee spring, but from the most insensate and deplorable folly?

But the sinner does not understand this, for he is blinded by his passions. He wishes to satisfy them and

to be freed from God's authority. He wishes to use, as they shall dictate, his understanding, his heart, his senses, and the creatures that minister to his wants.

Give me the portion of substance that falleth to me, said the prodigal son to his father; *and he divided unto them his substance.* God gives men free will; they can either use or abuse what they have received from him, but they assume the responsibility; for they must submit frequently in this life, and always in the next, to the consequences of their choice.

Not many days after, the younger son went abroad into a far country. That is exactly what the sinner does; he travels very quickly along the road to evil. He passes from the friendship to the enmity of God, from the state of innocence to that of guilt, from the empire of Jesus Christ to that of the devil.

He went abroad; the sinner by the very act of sinning departs from God. O how deeply he afflicts his loving Father, who says to him by his grace: "Remain with me, do not cross the threshold of my house, where I have reared thee. Remain, O my son! Thy departure would be an insult to me, and would draw numberless evils upon thy own head." And when the sinner has departed, the Lord follows with eyes of pity, pleading unceasingly: "Return, my son, return to thy Father who wishes to pardon thee and restore thee to his love."

But deaf to his voice, the prodigal journeys on. He goes into a far country, into a land of darkness where the people sit in the shadow of death, and there he squanders all his substance by living in debauchery. The slave of his passions, he sacrifices to them all he has without any thought of the dire consequences of his

criminal conduct. He has no eyes but for the present moment and the enjoyment which it brings. He sacrifices to vice his peace of mind, his honor, his strength, his riches, even health and life.

Soon all is squandered; *and there came a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want.* The nourishment of the soul is found in truth and love. What, then, must be its suffering when it has no other food than error and vice? It soon perishes of hunger, for it seeks in vain for satisfaction from the pleasures of the senses. Created to be the companion of angels, it craves the invisible food of these heavenly spirits; and so long as it is deprived of this, it experiences the bitter pangs of growing hunger.

And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country. And he sent him into his farm, to feed swine. O to what a master does the sinner hire himself—the devil! that cruel master who is not only inaccessible to pity, but who even gloats over our sufferings, and forces all who belong to him to share in his own degradation! He sends them to his farm to feed swine. O sinner, to what a state of debasement hast thou sunk in becoming the slave of the devil! What has become of the nobility of thy dignity? Son of a King, thou art made the keeper of swine! Thou art even sunk lower, for the prodigal who represents thee craved the food that the swine ate. He longed for it, but even that poor boon was denied him. What a frightful state of misery and degradation! Reflect well upon it, and make haste to free thyself from such ignominious slavery.

The unhappy young man "returns to himself." He

reflects on his condition. He thinks of his father and of the happiness which he enjoyed with him, and says: *How many hired servants in my father's house have plenty of bread, and I here perish with hunger!* What an advantage it is to the sinner to have at any time experienced the happiness of God's friendship, and never to have met in the path of evil anything but sorrow upon sorrow! These are precious graces by which God calls upon him to return. Happy will he be if he corresponds to them, if he says from the bottom of his heart: *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.*

Such is the resolution of the prodigal. He acknowledges his fault, he confesses it with sentiments of the most profound humility; he truly repents and at the same time hopes for pardon. He knows the goodness of him from whom he is going to ask forgiveness; he entertains not the slightest doubt of being restored to his friendship. *And rising up, he went to his father.*

He is not deceived. *And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and running to him, fell upon his neck and kissed him.* Clasping him to his heart, the kind father makes no reproaches, and when the prodigal says: *I have sinned against heaven and before thee,* he does not even allow him to finish, but calling the servants, says to them: *Bring forth quickly the first robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry: because this my son*

was dead, and is come to life again; he was lost and is found.

O my God, how great is thy goodness! How, then, can we doubt thy mercy, however numerous and great our offences may have been? Thy heart is always disposed to pardon us, and when we return to thee and ask for grace, thou restorest us to thy friendship.

APPLICATION

While meditating on the parable of the prodigal son, let us renew our fidelity to God. Let us protest that we wish to abide with him forever, remain in his house and persevere in his service. Let us stay with our good Father, and reject with horror every thought of departing from him. Let us remember that nothing is so unreasonable, nothing brings so many sufferings and misfortunes in its train, as withdrawing from the service of God. Separated from him, the soul may stupefy itself, but it cannot attain satisfaction. The sum of its experience will always be disappointment, weariness and desolation.

Let us grow in hatred of sin, which makes us so miserable and degrades us so wretchedly. Let us repent of the sins which we have committed. Let us confess them with all humility, and resolving never more to commit them, fervently implore God's forgiveness.

Let us go with confidence to God, who is always disposed to show us mercy. Let us return to our good Father and never more forsake him.

PRAYER

O God of goodness, my only Good, I have departed

from thee by sin; and since then I have had no other inheritance than suffering and humiliation. Thou hast permitted this suffering that I might not continue in such a state, but be moved to return to thee. I now return with feelings of regret and confidence like those of the prodigal son. I, too, will say: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son.* Yes, I have sinned, but I sincerely repent, and I ask thy forgiveness. Deign to receive me once more into thy house, and to give me the kiss of peace. I promise never more to quit thee, to serve thee for the time to come with inviolable fidelity, and to repair by true penance all the errors of my past life.

Résumé, page 321.

Let us reflect on the meaning of this parable.

1. The prodigal is young, and acts foolishly: it is folly to commit sin.

2. He goes away from his father:—sin removes us from God.

3. He finds in his wanderings only poverty, degradation, slavery:—far from God there is nought but unhappiness.

4. Confused and repentant, he returns with confidence to his father:—thus the sinner returns to God when he corresponds with grace.

5. His father receives him with the greatest kindness:—so God receives the sinner who is converted.

—In meditating on these thoughts:

1. Let us renew our fidelity to God.

2. Let us never think of leaving our good Father.

3. Let us be convinced that sin is supreme folly.

4. Let us repent of the sins we have committed.

5. Let us ask pardon of God, who is always disposed to show us mercy.

TWELFTH MEDITATION

THE MERCY OF GOD

His tender mercies are over all his works.—Ps. cxliv. 9.

CONSIDERATION

God loves all his creatures, but he has a special love for man whom he has created to his own image. He loves him in spite of his miseries, and even because of his miseries, which he tenderly compassionates. Our miseries are indeed great, greater even than we can understand. Our life is a series of toils and trials, a struggle against death which, however, inevitably triumphs in the end. In the physical order, and still more in the moral order, a host of evils assails us. The earth upon which we live is an abode of sorrow, where, alas! we everywhere meet with sin, the greatest of miseries, and either immediately or remotely the source of all others. Hence we have reason to mourn over our condition. Still we should never be discouraged. Whatever our miseries may be, the mercy of God is infinitely greater than they. God desires nothing more than to exercise it; for it is this perfection of which he gives most evidence in this world. How many facts might be cited to prove this!

On the day of the first sin, God manifested his justice: he cursed the serpent, he subjected Adam and

Eve to painful labor and to death, and banished them from the earthly paradise. And yet he manifested his mercy more strikingly than his justice. Through compassion for our first parents he went down to them and questioned them, to give them an opportunity of confessing their sin and asking for mercy. Even before condemning them he announced the coming of a Redeemer. And to the serpent he said: *I will put enmities between thee and the woman . . . she shall crush thy head.*[1]

O divine mercy, thou appearest with the first of human miseries! Like a mother's hand, thou comest to dry the first tear of man when sorrow came upon him, and thou dost most superabundantly atone for his fault, which has in consequence been called "a necessary sin, a happy fault."[2]

The mercy of God has been at work in the course of the ages. It was shown to Cain when he became a fratricide, for the Lord spoke to him in order to move him to repent and to ask forgiveness. Even when he was about to curse him, he longed to forgive him.

The history of the Jewish people seems but a record of God's mercy. With what patience he supported their murmurs, so insulting to his providence! He even seemed to make them the motive of the miracles which he wrought. After one murmuring comes the passage of the Red sea, after another appear the manna and water from the rock. Sometimes he revealed himself as a Lord terrible to the people who so often abandoned his service, but his mercy always prevailed over his justice. For one moment Moses seemed to doubt of it,

[1]Gen. iii. 15. [2]Office of Holy Saturday.

not daring to believe that God would renew the miracle of Mount Horeb; and he therefore struck the rock twice. Immediately God reproved him for his fault and condemned him to die without entering the promised land. His heart was grieved that the mildest of men should put limits to his mercy. He manifested his goodness to Achab, and showed mercy to Manasses. He even revoked the decree he had passed against Nineveh, thereby giving striking proof of his great desire to grant pardon.

But if the mercy of God was exercised to such an extent under the old law, the law of fear, how can we express the extent to which it has been carried in the new law, the law of grace? Let us call to mind the mystery of the Incarnation. What is this but the coming of divine mercy to dwell personally among men? The Blessed Virgin, whom the angel salutes on the part of the Most High, is to be called the Mother of Mercy, and from that moment she fulfilled all her duties as such. She conceived in her womb the Son of God. But why did the Word become incarnate? He himself tells us that it was for sinners, for the afflicted, for the wretched, for those whose hearts were weighed down by sorrow and crushed by oppression. In taking upon himself our miseries he was actuated by the tenderest compassion.

Let us follow the course of his life. What wonderful goodness he shows, what unbounded meekness towards even the greatest of sinners! Magdalen casts herself at his feet, and she rises pardoned and filled with grace. He enters the house of Zacheus the publican, and immediately Zacheus becomes his disciple and is admitted

among the children of Abraham. They bring to him a guilty woman, and not only does he not condemn her, but he delivers her from those that sought her death. Peter thrice denies him, and his suffering Master casts upon him a look of love which calls forth tears of repentance from the apostle and makes him the first of penitents. A thief about to die with him on the cross, prays: *Remember me,* and he answers, *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*[1]

What circumstance of his life is there that is not marked by his goodness, his kindness and compassion to the unfortunate! As with his deeds, so with his words. Let us recall those in which he depicts the goodness of God under the image of the good shepherd, or the father of the prodigal son.

Finally, let us behold him nailed to the cross, the altar of his sacrifice. There it is that his mercy is most apparent. There it is that these words received their entire fulfillment: *God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.*[2] It was on the tree of the cross, when burdened with the sins of the whole world, that he satisfied the divine justice. He there paid our debt, suffering what we should have suffered, and repeating these words: *Father, forgive them!* He offered himself up as a victim that divine mercy might be extended to us; and that it might be continued to the end of the ages, he founded his Church and instituted his Sacraments.

The great aim of his Vicar on earth is to bless and console. The ministry of his priests is essentially a

[1]Luke xxiii. 43. [2]John iii. 16, 17.

ministry of forgiveness. He has given them power to forgive sins, and to that power he has put no limits. What a consoling institution is not the sacrament of penance, whereby the sinner is forgiven on condition that he confess his sins and sincerely repent of them! O it is with reason that it is called the tribunal of mercy!

The same divine attribute is manifest in everything connected with religion. Prayers, ceremonies, festivals, everything proclaims that the earth is full of the mercies of the Lord, that he wishes to show us kindness, that he seeks the sinner, that he goes forth to meet him, knocks at his heart, and urges him to accept pardon. Everything bears witness to the fact that his compassion for us is unbounded, and that we cannot cause him greater joy than by giving him an opportunity of exhibiting his mercy in our regard.

APPLICATION

While meditating on the mercy of God, let us renew our love for him. Let us with all our heart love our Father who is so full of goodness, and who, even when we offend him, still loves us, and presses us by his grace to return to him. Let us hearken to his voice; let us yield to his entreaties. Let us go to him with confidence, for he wishes to pardon us. Let us go to him in a spirit of true repentance, and he will assuredly forgive us.

O how happy we shall be if we return to his friendship! What a gentle peace we shall experience when our conscience will tell us that we stand well with

God, that he is again pleased to look upon us as his beloved children!

Let us reflect that, being made to the image of God, we should imitate our Savior, and after his example forgive every offence done to us. Remember that Jesus Christ has said: *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful;*[1] and *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*[2]

PRAYER

O my God and my Father! I have not until now known the sentiments of thy heart. I dreaded the severity of thy justice; but I did not understand the greatness of thy mercies, which far exceed my crimes. Therefore it is that, wretch, though I am, I now confide in thy goodness, and come with eagerness to throw myself into thy arms, beseeching thee to forgive all my sins, and to give me the grace to serve thee henceforth with perfect and persevering fidelity.

Résumé, page 321.

Let us remember:

1. The promise of a Messiah made to Adam after his fall.
2. The patience of God with his people.
3. His clemency toward repentant sinners.
4. The sacrifice of the cross, where he becomes a victim to disarm the Father's justice.
5. The institution of the sacrament of penance, the erection of the tribunal of mercy.

Let us reflect, then, that if our miseries are great, the mercy of God infinitely surpasses them.

[1]Luke vi. 36. [2]Matt. v. 7.

—Wherefore:

1. Let us love our bountiful father.

2. Let us love him with our whole heart.

3. Let us have recourse to him with the most entire confidence.

4. Let us repent, and he will forgive us.

5. Let us forgive, after his example, and forgive all. Let us extend toward our fellow religious the mercy which he extends toward us.

THIRTEENTH MEDITATION

JESUS CHRIST DESTROYING SIN

Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who taketh away the sins of the world.—John i. 29.

CONSIDERATION

Let us adore Jesus Christ coming into this world to take away its sins, and let us meditate on his sentiments and his conduct in reference to sin, the source of all other evils in time and eternity. Jesus Christ hates sin. Loving his Father with an infinite love, and seeking the perfect accomplishment of his holy will, he could not but have an infinite hatred for sin, which is an injury to God, and a revolt against his supreme authority. Jesus Christ is holiness, innocence, and justice; how then could he fail to cherish infinite hatred for sin of every kind, under whatever form and in whatever place it presents itself? Such, indeed, are the sentiments of his divine heart, according to the words of the royal prophet: *Thou hast loved justice, and hated iniquity.*[1]

Sin is so great an abomination in his sight that by a singular privilege he willed to preserve his most holy Mother entirely from its stain, and therefore he decreed her immaculate conception. He wished to avoid even the least appearance of sin, and could therefore say

[1]Ps. xliv. 8.

to his enemies: *Which of you shall convince me of sin?*[1] Moreover, he never ceased to denounce and oppose it. He had already condemned it by his prophets, and by all those who were types of him in the old law. By the mouth of King David he had said: *Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*[2] *The wickedness of sinners shall be brought to nought.*[3] *The wicked shall be turned into hell;*[4] *but they that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the land.*[5] Elsewhere he put these words on the lips of the Wise Man: *All iniquity of nations is execrable.*[6] *The teeth of sin are the teeth of a lion, killing the souls of men.*[7]

Finally, directly and in person, he condemned sin while he was on earth. Let us recall his anathemas against the hypocritical Pharisees; against those who refused to forgive injuries; against sensual men as represented by Dives; against those who rejected grace, who abused his gifts, and to whom he addressed these words: *Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida; for if in Tyre and Sidon the mighty works had been done that have been done in you, they would long ago have done penance in sackcloth and ashes.*[8]

But it is especially in the next life that he condemns sin. As supreme Judge he pronounces the sentence that fixes the lot of each man for all eternity. Woe to them who appear before his tribunal sullied by mortal sin! They will hear from his lips the sentence which will both condemn their sin and commit them to the frightful torments of hell.

[1]John viii. 46. [2]Ps. vi. 9. [3]Ibid. vii. 10.
[4]Ibid. ix. 18. [5]Ibid. xxxvi. 9. [6]Eccles. x. 7.
[7]Ibid. xxi. 3. [8]Matt. xi. 21.

Although Jesus hates and condemns sin, yet he wishes to free us from it and to satisfy the divine justice for us. He alone can do that; for he alone can offer adequate satisfaction for an infinite offence. *He has taken upon him our iniquities;*[1] he became a victim for us. God placed upon him the sins of all men; upon him he laid the heavy arm of his justice. What a subject for meditation: Jesus Christ the victim of sin! What a picture it presents of the sufferings that weighed down upon him, crushed him, and killed him!

From the hour of his entrance into this world, he wept over our sins. The crib where he lay was wet with his tears, and it was for our sins that he shed them. His whole life was a series of sufferings, contradictions and sorrows, ending in a most cruel death; and all this he endured to merit grace for us from his heavenly Father.

Let us contemplate him, when he says to his enemies: *This is your hour,*[2] and advances to become at their hands a victim for our sins. He stretches forth his hands to the hateful chains; he is led to the altar of his sacrifice, being subjected on the way to every sort of insult and outrage. Let us behold him at last on Calvary, lifted up on the cross, enduring the most burning thirst, the most painful agony, the most heart-rending sufferings, the most bitter grief, ending in absolute desolation of spirit. He is a leper struck by the hand of God. His body is one wound, his flesh is so torn that his bones may be counted. Even the last drop of his blood trickles down upon the ground which is wet with the price of our ransom. Thus does he

[1]Isai. liii. 4. [2]Luke xxii. 53.

atone for sin; and, while thus suffering, he pleads with his heavenly Father for us all: *Father, forgive them.*[1]

Jesus Christ, who offered reparation for our offences upon the cross, continues that satisfaction upon our altars, where he remains unceasingly the victim for our sins. There he offers himself in a mystical manner, in virtue of the merits of his bloody sacrifice, appeasing the divine justice which we cease not to irritate, reconciling us with his Father, and taking away the sins of the world.

But Jesus has not only atoned for sin; he also gives us the means of preventing it and of destroying it within ourselves. He has provided a remedy for this disease of the soul; he has poured oil and wine into the wounds of man who had fallen among devils. He has taught the nations what an evil it is to offend God, and what joy attends the practice of virtue. He has founded his Church, by which, till the end of time, he continues his work of sanctifying souls and destroying sin. He has established the pure morality of the Gospel, which is the admiration of even the enemies of Holy Writ. By it he has formed the conscience of Christians, making it delicate, just, and enlightened. He has instituted the sacraments of baptism and penance for the remission of sins, saying to his apostles: *Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven.*[2]

Behold what Jesus Christ has done in reference to sin. He labors without ceasing for its destruction, both in his own person and by the ministry of his Church.

[1]Luke xxiii. 34. [2]John xx. 23.

APPLICATION

As disciples of Jesus Christ, let us become more deeply imbued with the thoughts and the sentiments of our adorable Master. Like him, let us have an infinite hatred of sin. Let the very name and semblance of sin cause us horror, and let us prove the sincerity of our hatred by our fidelity in avoiding occasions of sin.

Let us condemn sin; but after the example of Jesus Christ let us be compassionate to sinners. Let us unite zeal for the glory of God with charity, meekness, and kindness towards all men.

In union with our Savior, let us atone for sin; let us by repentance disarm the justice of God, irritated against us. Our Redeemer has offered satisfaction for sin, but he wills that a portion of his passion should be accomplished in us. Let us remember this, and embrace with courage the cross on which we should offer ourselves with him.

Let us labor without ceasing to destroy sin in ourselves. Let us profit by the means given us for this purpose. Let us receive the sacrament of penance with all the requisite dispositions, and, after hearing the sentence of absolution pronounced over us, let us keep ourselves in the state of innocence to which we have been restored.

Let us be zealous in inspiring our pupils with hatred of sin and with a firm purpose to avoid its occasions. Let us teach them to appreciate, love and embrace the practices of religion, which can preserve them from evil or deliver them from its yoke. What a service we

shall thus render them, and how heavily it will weigh in our favor in the balance of divine justice!

PRAYER

O Jesus, who didst come into the world to destroy sin and deliver us from the cruel slavery of hell, grant, I beseech thee, that thy mission may be fully accomplished in me. Penetrate my heart with the sentiments of thy adorable heart. Give me a love of justice, a hatred of iniquity, and a willingness to suffer everything to satisfy the justice of God. Grant that I may die to sin, to live eternally in thee and with thee. Grant also that I may guide properly the children entrusted to me. Deign so to bless my labors, that I may succeed in inspiring my pupils with a horror of sin and with a most ardent desire of living and dying in thy holy love.

Résumé, page 322.

Jesus Christ is the enemy of sin.

1. He hates it with an infinite hatred.
2. He condemns it and makes it the subject of his sentence of eternal reprobation.
3. He has atoned for it upon the cross by the shedding of all his blood.
4. He continues to expiate it upon our altars, where he unceasingly makes himself a victim for our offences.
5. He provides a remedy for sin by his example, his morality, his institutions, his sacraments.

—It is necessary, then, if we are to be his disciples:

1. To bear an infinite hatred to sin.
2. To condemn sin, but to compassionate the sinner.

3. To atone for sin, to enter courageously upon the way of penance and persevere therein.

4. To labor unceasingly to destroy sin in ourselves and to confess with good dispositions.

5. To be zealous in inspiring our pupils with hatred and aversion for sin.

FOURTEENTH MEDITATION

THE SAINTS AND SIN

How then can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God?—Gen. xxxix. 9.

CONSIDERATION

As far as was possible for them, the saints entertained the same sentiments as Jesus Christ regarding sin, and ruled their conduct by that of their divine Master. They hated and abhorred sin, and they grieved when they saw it committed. Enlightened as they were by the Holy Ghost, they knew that sin is an insult to God, a cruel outrage offered to our tender Father, a misery which was the beginning of an infinity of other evils. They thought of the maledictions pronounced against sin; they remembered how terribly God punished it in the rebel angels, in Adam, in Cain, and in so many individuals of all times who have been struck by his wrath. They sounded the depths of hell, and reflected that sin had dug them out and peopled them. They fixed their eyes upon the cross, and contemplated Jesus Christ, the victim for our sins; they measured, as far as they could, the ocean of sorrow into which he was plunged, and at that sight their hearts were penetrated with hatred of sin, and horror of an evil that had caused such suffering to our divine Savior.

The saints avoided sin, even at the greatest sacrifices, and thus above all did they show their hatred of it. Let us call to mind, in the Old Law, Joseph, Susanna, the aged Eleazar, the seven brothers Macchabees, and many others who preferred to suffer ignominy, torments, and death itself, rather than consent to sin; answering those who pressed them to commit it, "How could I sin against my God! How could I insult him in his very presence! I would rather die innocent than live guilty."

Let us recall the legions of martyrs in the New Law. What is the history of these fourteen millions of heroes but the recital of what they have done and suffered to avoid sin? They were commanded to renounce their faith, and they refused; they were menaced, and they offered their limbs to be tortured; they were again urged to obey, and they presented their necks to the axe of the executioner. They suffered torments the simple recital of which makes us shudder, and from which the imagination recoils with horror; and to put an end to these torments, to substitute for them all the pleasures and enjoyments of earth, they had but to speak one word; but since that word was an offence against God they would not utter it.

Besides the martyrs, how many saints have there not been, of whom it may be said, as was said of St. Basil, "This man fears nothing but sin!" How many saints, like St. Martinian and St. Thomas of Aquin, resisted the most dangerous temptations with a most energetic will! Yes, the saints avoided sin, and therefore they shunned its occasions. Like us, they were inclined to evil; but more prudent than we, they took care not to

expose themselves to the danger of sin. What precautions did they not take to prevent temptations or to triumph over them! With what care did they not watch over their eyes, lest they might see the vanities of the world! over their minds, not to consent to bad thoughts! over their hearts, to keep them pure!

The saints made a worthy use of the means established to preserve the soul from sin—frequent and fervent reception of the sacraments, prayer, vigilance, particular examen, manifestation of conscience, docility to spiritual direction, and constant labor. They neglected nothing that could help form a bulwark of safety.

It is true that among the saints there were some who had committed sin, who had even sunk deep into the mire of iniquity; but when, by the light of faith, they saw the shameful leprosy of sin with which they were covered, they deplored their errors, they had recourse to God, they begged his grace, and with the help of grace they embraced practices of the most austere penance.

Let us think of David clothed in sackcloth, eating ashes like bread, watering his couch with his tears, and wasted away with sorrow. Let us think of St. Peter, lamenting during his whole life the misfortune of having denied his divine Master, so that his tears had furrowed his cheeks. Let us call to mind St. Magdalen passing, according to tradition, thirty years in a frightful wilderness to expiate her sins; St. Augustine deploring unceasingly the sins that he had committed, and striving to compensate by love of God the injury they had done him; the many anchorites who lived in the desert a life of such privations as to alarm our delicacy. Yes, they had sinned; but with what severity

did they not punish themselves for it! How severely did they not chastise their bodies, and crucify their flesh with its appetites! They had but one aim in view —to satisfy the justice of God in union with the adorable Victim of Calvary.

The saints were animated by an ardent, courageous, persevering zeal against sin. Their whole ambition was to destroy it. To succeed in this they instructed, exhorted, counselled, entreated, admonished, condemned, and even anathematized. They prayed, and asked others to pray; they gave themselves up to arduous labors; they shrank from no sacrifice; they founded good works of every kind. They counted it an immense gain if they could succeed in keeping souls from sin or withdrawing them from its empire; saying with St. Ignatius, that they would think the labors of a lifetime well compensated, could they thereby prevent even a single venial sin.

APPLICATION

Let us bless our Lord for having given us such admirable models in the person of his saints. Let us imitate them with fidelity and constancy. Let us hate and fear sin. Let us flee from the sight of it as we would from a serpent. Let us avoid it at every cost, and employ for this purpose the means furnished us by our holy state.

Let us watch over our senses, our thoughts, our hearts. Let us keep aloof from the world, as our rules prescribe. Let us mortify our tastes, our inclinations, our humors. Let us distrust ourselves, and refrain

resolutely from everything that might be a subject of temptation to us. Let us be men of prayer; let us draw from our union with Jesus Christ the strength which we need to prevent and destroy sin in our souls.

Like the saints, let us punish ourselves for the sins which we have committed. Let us not easily forget that we have contracted an immense debt to divine justice, and that nothing is of more importance to us than to pay it. Like the saints, let us labor to destroy sin in the souls of others. What might we not do in this respect by fervent prayers offered up with a view to obtain the conversion of sinners, by an edifying life, by care in discharging zealously the duties in which we are employed by obedience!

What an excellent work it is to train up childhood and youth in hatred of sin and in avoidance of its occasions, in pious practices fitted to preserve the soul from evil, or at least withdraw it from sin if it has had the misfortune to contract its guilt! Let us understand this, and neglect nothing that can conduce to so useful an end.

How sincerely we shall felicitate ourselves on our conduct when our life's career closes! Having followed in the footsteps of the saints, we shall arrive at the same end with them. Jesus Christ will pronounce on us the same sentence, he will place on our brow the crown of justice, and he will admit us into the number of his elect.

PRAYER

Saints of God, friends of Jesus Christ, who reign with him in glory, deign to intercede for us, and to

obtain for us the grace to imitate you in hatred of sin and in zeal to destroy it both in ourselves and in the souls of those entrusted to our care; so that, glorifying God after your example, we may share the infinite happiness with which he has rewarded your fidelity.

Résumé, page 322.

The Saints had the same sentiments for sin as had Jesus Christ.

1. They hated and abhorred sin.

2. They avoided it with the greatest care, and even at the sacrifice of life.

3. They fled from the occasions of sin.

4. Those who had committed it did penance for it, and what penance!

5. They were animated with an ardent, courageous, and persevering zeal to destroy it.

—As children of saints, are we their imitators?

1. Do we hate sin?

2. Do we avoid it at any cost?

3. Do we shun its occasions?

4. Do we deplore having committed it so often?

5. Are we zealous in inducing our pupils to avoid sin and its occasions? What good we may do in this respect if we are moved by the spirit of our vocation!

FIFTEENTH MEDITATION

JESUS CHRIST AND SINNERS

I am not come to call the just, but sinners.—Luke ix. 13.

CONSIDERATION

What proofs has not our Lord given of his kindness to sinners? In the old law, and even from the beginning of the world, God had shown wonderful mercy. Being the Word of God, he knew the extent of the crime of Adam and Eve in disobeying, and he offered to atone for it, telling our first parents that he would look upon them with pity and save them from everlasting death.

As the ages went on he ceased not to make known by his angels and his prophets his compassionate love for the souls held captive by Satan. In a thousand ways he expressed the thought of his heart: *I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*[1]

At the period fixed in his decrees, the Eternal Word assumed our nature. He came to dwell among us miserable creatures, who were so deeply in debt to divine justice. O mystery of the Incarnation, thou art the mystery of the love of Jesus Christ for guilty man! The Infant-God whom I behold in the crib is full of love for sinners, fixing his eyes upon them, stretching

[1]Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

forth his hands to them, calling them, entreating them to come to him.

He consents to be the victim of their reconciliation with his Father. It is for their sake that he embraces a life of sorrows; it is for them that he will go forth to labor and suffer; it is for them he will lay down his life on Calvary; it is for them he will continue that oblation on the altar, where till the end of time he will offer up his merits to his Father, in order to obtain mercy for man.

What is there in his life that does not testify to his love for sinners? Is it not manifest in his every word and deed? Did he not say to sinners: *Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you?*[1] Is it not sinners whom he invites to his banquet in the words of the father of a family to his servants: *Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in that my house may be filled?*[2] With what kindness does he not speak of them to the Pharisees: *They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are sick. Go then and learn what this meaneth: I will have mercy, and not sacrifice! For I am not come to call the just, but sinners.*[3] In another place, checking the excessive zeal of the sons of Zebedee, he says: *The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save;*[4] a thought which he repeats later on: *The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*[5]

His love for sinners is admirably expressed in many of his parables. Consider the figures in which he

[1]Matt. xi. 28. [2]Luke xiv. 23. [3]Matt. ix. 12, 13.
[4]Luke ix. 56. [5]Ibid. xix. 10.

speaks of the sinful soul. In one place, he likens it to a groat which had been lost, and which a woman, representing the Church, seeks with great care, and when she has found it, she rejoices exceedingly. In another place he compares it to a lost sheep which the shepherd follows until he has overtaken it, when he places it on his shoulders, and joyfully returns with it to the fold. Elsewhere he speaks of it under the likeness of the prodigal son who, having fled from his father's house and squandered all his substance in debauchery, returns to his father, and is received by him with heartfelt joy.

How great must have been his compassion for the sick and infirm who came to him from all parts! What, then, are we to think of his compassion for sinners, for enfeebled, sick, and dead souls who are infinitely more to be pitied than persons afflicted by the most grievous distempers of the body? For these souls he had such tender pity that it was made a subject of reproach to him: *This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.*[1] It was indeed true. He received them with kindness and even went in search of them. On one occasion he sat near the well of Jacob to await and convert the Samaritan woman. On another, he pardoned the repentant Magdalen. At Jericho he abode in the house of Zacheus, the chief of the publicans. In the temple he refused to condemn the adulterous woman and saved her from her accusers. On the cross he asked his Father to pardon his executioners, and he extended the fullness of his mercy to the penitent thief.

To whom did he ever close his heart? Whom did he

[1]Luke xv. 2.

ever reject? No one, not even Judas! Did he not press him to his breast at the very moment when the wretch was betraying him? Did he not even then give him the sweet name of friend?

O sinners, why should you fear Jesus? why tremble like slaves in his presence? His eyes are fixed upon you and express nothing but kindness. His voice in calling you is full of sweetness. His arms are opened to you, his head bent towards you; his ardent desire is to clasp you to his bosom and give you the kiss of peace. Go then to him with confidence.

He loves you with a most ardent and generous love; he loves you with the love that fastened him to the cross, and held him there till he had breathed forth his last sigh. Can you, then, doubt his love when you contemplate him as a victim on the altar of the cross? Do you remember his own words: *Greater love than this no man hath, than that a man lay down his life for his friends?*[1] And does not St. Paul say: *God commendeth his charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners . . . Christ died for us?*[2]

The pity of Jesus Christ for sinners continues to be exercised by his bishops and priests, to whom he has given power to forgive sins. Through their ministrations, he reconciles us with his Father, he washes us in his own blood, he offers us forgiveness and entreats us to ask it. He restores us to our former state and settles us in peace, giving us a foretaste of the joys which he prepares for us in the next life, and which he will bestow upon us if we correspond to his graces here below.

[1]John xv. 13. [2]Rom. v. 8, 9.

APPLICATION

Let us adore the goodness of Jesus Christ towards us poor sinners. Let us praise his infinite mercy, let us exalt his goodness to us, in spite of the numberless blemishes which he discovers in our souls. Let us put our confidence in him, and repose on his love for us. Let us believe in his willingness to pardon our offences and fill us with his grace; and let us reject every doubt on this head as an insult to his loving heart.

Let us instil into our pupils a like confidence in him, and induce them to love him with all their hearts. Let us be true models to them in this respect. Let us give our Savior love for love. Let us show him that our hearts burn with the fire of divine charity, that they belong wholly to him who sacrificed himself for us. Let us give proof that we value his love for us.

Let us attach ourselves to him, and serve him with unswerving fidelity. Let us remember that to do this we must strive to imitate him. Like him, let us be compassionate and charitable; let us pardon willingly, and love to pardon; let us love sinners, let us love those who are most abandoned, and eagerly seek for the lost sheep. Let us thus merit to have these words fulfilled in us: *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*[1]

PRAYER

"O Jesus, who didst pardon Mary Magdalen, and hearken to the thief upon the cross, thou hast given

[1]Matt. v. 7.

me grounds to hope in thy mercy;"[1] and therefore do I come to thee. A stray sheep, I return to the fold; a prodigal son, I come back to my father's house. Deign to pardon me, O my Shepherd, O my Father, and sustain me by thy grace in my present dispositions, that I may give as much joy to the angels by my conversion as I have hitherto grieved them by my wanderings.

Résumé, page 323.

What charity our Lord Jesus Christ had for sinners!

1. Son of God, for them he made himself man.
2. For them he labored. suffered, and died.
3. For them he continues to immolate himself upon the altar.
4. He spoke of them only as objects dear to his heart. He rejected none of them. His goodness toward them was so great that his enemies reproached him with it.
5. He instituted the sacrament of penance, wherein he never ceases to offer them pardon.

As sinners, why do we not understand how much Jesus Christ loves us!

—Yes, everything urges us:

1. To adore his bounty, his infinite mercy.
2. To return to him with confidence.
3. To return to him promptly, this very moment.
4. To give him back love for love.
5. To attach ourselves to him, to serve him with unfailing fidelity.

[1] *Dies Iræ.*

SIXTEENTH MEDITATION

INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them.—John xx. 23.

CONSIDERATION

Let us adore our Lord Jesus Christ, who, although he hates sin with an infinite hatred, yet is filled with compassion for sinners. His divine heart abhors the very appearance of sin, and yet it burns with love for even the most guilty. It is by virtue of this hatred and this love that he wishes so sincerely to destroy sin.

He came upon earth to do this work, and inspired his holy precursor to call him *the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.*[1] His mission is truly the destruction of sin, as was foretold by the prophets and are figured by the Jewish ceremonies.

The miracles that he wrought during his life on earth were also symbols of the healing of souls. All those infirmities of the body which he healed by his omnipotence represented infirmities of the soul, to which he applied a still more admirable remedy, and of which they were, remotely or immediately, the unhappy consequence.

He came to wash away sin by his own blood. By the infinite merits of his sacrifice he has merited favor for us in the eyes of divine Majesty. St. Paul speaks

[1]John i. 29.

of him as *blotting out the handwriting of the decree which was against us, which was contrary to us, and the same he took out of the way, fastening it to the cross.*[1]

Jesus Christ forgave sins directly whilst upon earth. Let us call to mind the cure of the man sick of the palsy at Capharnaum. Seeing the faith of his attendants, he said to the sick man, *Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee.*[2] Some of the scribes present were scandalized, but he answered them: *Which is easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say, Rise up and walk? But, that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, then, said he to the man sick of the palsy: Rise up, take thy bed and go into thy house.*[3]

Let us recall Mary Magdalen, of whom he said: *Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much;*[4] and Zacheus, whom he called a child of Abraham, adding that salvation had come to his house. Let us remember the sick whom he cured at once, in soul and body, and whom he dismissed with these words: *Behold thou art made whole, sin no more.*[5]

But since Jesus Christ was to remain visible only a short time among men, and since he wished his mission to continue after his ascension and to extend over the whole earth, he gave his apostles and their successors power to forgive sins. He had already said to St. Peter: *I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou*

[1]Col. ii. 14. [2]Matt. ix. 2. [3]Ibid. ix. 5, 6.
[4]Luke vii. 47. [5]John v. 14.

shalt loose upon earth it shall be loosed also in heaven.[1] But he conferred this power anew upon him and then upon the other apostles, when he appeared to them on the day of his resurrection in the room where they were assembled.

Let us reflect upon this circumstance in which he gave so precious a pledge of his love for us poor sinners. He had just risen from the dead. He had vanquished death, and broken its sting for all the faithful who were or who would be united to him. He had accomplished all that he came to fulfill; he had now to make men share in these blessings. Our salvation had been merited; but it was still necessary to apply the merits by which alone we could be saved. Heaven was open; but it was necessary to furnish each of us with the means of gaining its happiness.

Now the great means to lead man to heaven, to apply to him the merits of his redemption and deliver him from the power of the devil, is the sacrament of penance which Jesus Christ instituted. Addressing himself to the assembled Apostles, he said: *Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose you shall retain, they are retained.*[2] By these words he gave them power to forgive all sins, whatever their number or their malice.

O adorable invention of his love! Supreme Judge of the living and the dead, he founded the tribunal of his justice on the threshold of eternity; but to enable us to prevent the excess of its severity, he established upon earth the tribunal of his mercy. That tribunal is always open; all can approach it, for it is in every church.

[1]Matt. xvi. 19. [2]John xx. 22, 23.

There the repentant sinner may come and prostrate himself, saying, *I have sinned against the Lord;*[1] and he will immediately hear those consoling words: *The Lord hath . . . taken away thy sin.*

In that tribunal is seated, not Jesus Christ personally, nor one of his angels; for in that case we might be afraid to draw near, but a man who, although clothed with the power of his divine Lord is, like us, weak and liable to sin, and consequently has but to look into his own heart to find motives for being indulgent to us.

O Sacrament of reconciliation, how can one think of thee without being filled with sentiments of gratitude towards thy divine Author! In thee are fulfilled the words of the prophet: "A fountain should be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to wash away the uncleanness of the sinner."

By thee the Savior remedies our evils and delivers us from our infirmities. Thou art the new Jordan in which those who wash are cleansed of their leprosy. Thou art the sacred bath of the blood of the Lamb, in which every one who has faith can recover the purity of his innocence. By thee, he who said: *I am the resurrection and the life,*[2] says again, *Young man, arise;*[3] or, as to Lazarus, *Come forth;*[4] and by these words he recalls to the life of grace souls that had been dead in his sight.

APPLICATION

Let us praise the infinite goodness of Jesus Christ

[1]2 Kings xii. 13. [2]John xi. 25. [3]Luke vii. 14. [4]John xi. 43.

towards sinful and unhappy man. Let us admire the works which it has moved him to perform. Let us particularly bless him for the sacrament by which he justifies us before his Father, and which is such a priceless gift of his loving heart. For the sacrament of penance is our hope and our strength, it restores us to the friendship of God and his angels, and gives us back our right to heaven.

Let us make a frequent and holy use of it. Let us never stay away from it with a disturbed and troubled conscience. Let us go to confession at the times fixed by our rules, and let us bring to it all the dispositions requisite. Let us esteem our holy state, in which we have so many means of avoiding sin and so many facilities for returning to God's grace, if we have had the misfortune to offend so good a Master.

The sacred pool is near us, and the angel is ever stirring its waters, and inviting us to descend and be cured of our spiritual maladies. Let us accept his invitation, and, once cured, let us take care to sin no more.

Let us instruct our pupils well in all that regards the sacrament of penance. Let us lead them to esteem and love it, and excite in them a desire to receive it frequently. Let us teach them how to make their confessions well. As far as depends on us, let us train them to a frequent reception of the sacraments. Is not this the true means of preserving them from evil, or withdrawing them from it when they have fallen into sin? Consequently, is not this the very essence of our mission as Christian teachers?

PRAYER

O heart of Jesus, abyss of love and compassion, that, after atoning for our crimes, dost purify us by thy blood and make us share in thy merits, be thou glorified and blessed forever for the sacrament of reconciliation which thou hast established in thy Church! Grant, by thy grace, that we may worthily receive it, and that we may preserve the spiritual life which thou givest us therein; for by this life we are united to thee in time, and by it we hope to be at last united to thee in eternity.

Résumé, page 323.

Let us consider Jesus Christ remitting sin and instituting the sacrament of penance.

1. It is for that reason that he came upon earth.
2. It is for that reason that he suffered and died.
3. He remitted it directly, as we see in the case of the paralytic, of Magdalen, of Zacheus.
4. He gave his Apostles and their successors the power of remitting it.
5. Let us picture him saying to them: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them."

—Admiring his infinite goodness:

1. Let us bless him for this salutary institution.
2. Let us make frequent and holy use of it.
3. Let us appreciate our state, wherein we can so easily have recourse to it.
4. Let us instruct our pupils well in what relates to the sacrament of penance.
5. Let us do our utmost to have them approach it frequently and with holy dispositions.

SEVENTEENTH MEDITATION

BENEFITS OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

I am the resurrection and the life.—John xi. 25.

CONSIDERATION

How wonderful and how salutary are the effects of the sacrament of penance! How powerfully its precious advantages should move us to glorify divine Providence! When we receive it with the requisite dispositions, we proclaim God's goodness, by which he pardons sinners. We exalt his greatness and majesty by humbling ourselves before his minister, sacrificing our pride to accuse ourselves of our offences. We do homage to his holiness, by confessing our guilt; to his wisdom and his power, by avowing our ignorance and our weaknesses; to his justice, by offering him the satisfaction which he requires, uniting it to that of his adorable Son on the cross. By receiving the sacrament of penance, therefore, we honor the perfections of God, and give joy to his heart, which is so anxious to bestow grace upon us and to cover us with his mercies.

What a satisfaction it is to our loving Father to see us return to him from whom sin had separated us! With what joy he goes forth to meet the prodigal son returning to his Father's house! This, in a sense, constitutes all his happiness; for what does he desire more

ardently than to make us experience the greatness of his goodness towards us?

But let us examine the effects of the sacrament of penance when received with the requisite dispositions. How much reason do they not furnish us for even greater gratitude and love to the Author of this inestimable benefit!

The sacrament of penance effaces the sins committed after baptism. If these sins be mortal, the soul before confession was dead; but after receiving absolution it lives anew the life of Jesus Christ. Our divine Master has said to it, as to the son of the widow of Naim, *Arise,* or, as to Lazarus, *Come forth.* His words are efficacious, for absolution has for that soul the virtue of a true resurrection. It annuls its sentence of condemnation; it turns aside the chastisements with which God was about to punish it; and it withdraws it from the power of the devil. By the efficacy of this sacrament the devils are banished from the heart of the sinner and deprived of their power over him. They forfeit their title deeds, which are cast into the fire; and the fetters of the sinner's bondage are broken.

The sacrament of penance is the plank after shipwreck, by which we may reach the harbor of safety. It is a new baptism which re-establishes us in the state from which we had fallen by sin. By this sacrament we become again friends of God, heirs of his kingdom, brothers of Jesus Christ, living members of the Church and sharers in the communion of saints. By it our soul, purified in the blood of the Lamb, recovers its former beauty, and shines with the splendor of divine grace. Again it puts on the nuptial robe that gives it

a right to sit down at the heavenly banquet. God renews his friendship with it; he looks upon it with complacency as his well-beloved child; he gives it the assurance that he will not judge it in his anger. He restores it to its former state in his eyes, and consequently in its own eyes and in those of all men. O miracle of Christ's mercy! We come burdened by debt to prostrate ourselves at the feet of his minister, and we arise laden with riches. The grace of absolution puts us again in possession of the spiritual treasures of which sin had stripped us; it restores our good actions to us, as well as our rights to that degree of glory with which God wishes to recompense us. By it our works become meritorious for heaven; they are no longer dead, but are recorded in the Book of Life and will be credited to us in eternity. The sacrament of penance restores peace to the soul and gives joy to the heart.

Who has not experienced this? Who has not been seized with terror at the thought that he was an enemy of God, that he was a fit subject of his vengeance, that he stood upon the brink of hell, separated only by death from that abyss into which the wicked are cast, and where they suffer forever every species of torment? Yes, it was to anguish of that kind that sin delivered us. Fear pierced our bones, remorse left no peace to our conscience. We experienced the truth of the prophet's saying, *that it is an evil and a bitter thing . . . to have left the Lord thy God.*[1]

But re-entering into ourselves, we acknowledged our guilt and unveiled our conscience before Christ's min-

[1]Jer. ii. 19.

ister, who at last pronounced the sentence of our pardon. O then what a change was wrought in us! It seemed to us that a great weight had been taken from our hearts, into which peace had again entered. We were no longer objects of shame in our own eyes; hope and love succeeded fear; God was no longer an irritated Judge, but the most loving of fathers. Our eyes turned with delight to heaven, and death seemed only a liberator since it was to open to us the gate of paradise.

Behold the effects of the sacrament of penance when received with the necessary dispositions. It is, moreover, one of the most efficacious means of advancing in perfection. By receiving it we practise the most admirable virtues: faith in Jesus Christ and his Church, hope of salvation, charity at least in its beginning, humility, obedience and sincerity. By receiving it frequently, we contract the habit of watching over ourselves; we take note of all our actions, and observe all our conduct; we know the state of our conscience.

We receive at the holy tribunal prudent advice that is both suited to our wants and of immense value for our spiritual guidance. We leave it with courage to do well and a resolution to persevere in the state of grace to which we have been restored. How, then, can we sufficiently esteem the source of so many blessings? How can we thank its divine Author as he deserves, for this gift of his liberality and his love?

APPLICATION

Let us adore our Lord instituting the sacrament of penance for us. Let us admire and praise his infinite

mercy. What goodness on his part who, although offended by our sins, yet establishes the means by which we may obtain pardon for them! Let us bless him for his pity on us poor sinners, and for procuring for us by the grace of absolution both life and salvation. Let us be heartily attached to his service, and live only to promote his glory.

Let us put ourselves in a state to profit by the graces offered to us. Let us carefully prepare for confession; and let us accuse ourselves with true contrition and a firm purpose of amending our lives. Lastly, let us watch over ourselves, that we may preserve the fruit of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Let us make known to our pupils this gift of God's mercy, and teach them to admire its excellence. Let us instruct them well in its advantages to the faithful individually, to their families and to society in general. Let us neglect nothing to inspire them with the greatest esteem for it and with the desire to have recourse frequently to this means of sanctification.

PRAYER

O Jesus, merciful Lord, be thou blessed for all thy mercies, but particularly for thy institution of the sacrament of penance, by which thou recallest us from sin to grace, from the slavery of the devil to the liberty of thy children, from death to life, from hell to heaven! Grant that we may always receive it with the dispositions of true penitents, and thus obtain all its effects. May it thus procure us the grace of living by thee on earth, that we may live with thee forever in heaven.

Résumé, page 324.

When we receive the sacrament of penance with the requisite dispositions:

1. We give joy to the heart of God.
2. We escape from the dominion of hell.
3. We recover the merits and the rights that we had lost by sin.
4. We taste peace of heart anew.
5. We feel disposed to the practice of virtue.

We pass from death to life. A greater miracle is wrought in us than was the resurrection of Lazarus.

—What reason have we not, then:

1. To glorify our Lord for instituting this sacrament?
2. To return thanks to his divine bounty?
3. To approach it only with a true desire of profiting by it?
4. To preserve its fruits after having received it?
5. To make it appreciated by our pupils, and induce them to approach it frequently and with good dispositions?

EIGHTEENTH MEDITATION

PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy.—Heb. iv. 16.

CONSIDERATION

The sacrament of penance, when received with all the requisite dispositions, produces the most admirable effects. Let us, then, leave nothing undone to acquire these dispositions, and for that purpose let us always bring sufficient preparation to our confessions. Let us remember that a great interest, our reconciliation with God, is at stake; let us remember that we are going to prostrate ourselves at the foot of the cross, to receive on our souls the precious blood which Jesus Christ poured forth for the expiation of our sins.

Let us begin by imploring the light of the Holy Ghost. Let us earnestly beseech him to enlighten our minds and to touch our hearts, penetrating them with the sentiments that he requires of us as conditions of our forgiveness. Knowledge of our sins, contrition, a firm purpose of amendment, and confidence in the divine mercy are gifts from on high which prayer brings down upon us. Let us, then, pray with fervor to obtain them, and thus make confessions that will be truly beneficial to us.

After having implored the light of the Holy Ghost, and invoked the protection of the most Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and our good angel guardian, let us occupy ourselves seriously with the examination of our conscience. Let us examine in God's presence what has been our conduct in regard to his holy law. Let us pass in review his commandments, and those of the Church. Let us consider our different obligations as Christians, as religious, and as teachers. Let us think of what we owe to God, our neighbor, and ourselves, and judge ourselves according to the standard of truth.

Let us distrust our self-love, which is so skilful in hiding our faults. Let us not deceive ourselves. Let us frankly acknowledge our interior to be such as it really is in the eyes of him who sees all things. Let us call to mind both our sins and such circumstances as change their species or increase their grievousness.

Let us give sufficient time to this examination. Let us not, however, give too much and thus leave little time to excite contrition; for as we approach the holy tribunal frequently, we should regard sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment as the most important points. If we have committed any grievous sins, they will at once come to our mind; as to the others, although it is very useful to confess them, it is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament to do so. Therefore the masters of the spiritual life advise us to declare some only of our venial sins, rather than a great number, but to take care to be truly sorry for each of those that we confess. They call attention to the principle that our confession would be null if we had not sorrow for at least one

of the sins of which we accuse ourselves, when we have no mortal sins to confess.

Let us then after our examination of conscience excite ourselves to sorrow for the faults that we have discovered. Let us reflect on the malice of sin, looking upon it is an odious revolt of the creature against the Creator. Let us ponder its characteristics, particularly its ingratitude to the most loving of fathers and kindest of benefactors. Let us remember that his goodness to us deserves fidelity and self-sacrifice on our part, and let us examine to what extent we have shown these in our conduct.

Let us raise our thoughts to heaven and reflect that as nothing defiled can enter there, sin has closed it against us. Let us then cast our eyes on purgatory and consider the punishment there inflicted on the venial sins which we commit, alas! in such numbers, and for which we feel so little regret. Let us descend deeper still: let us consider hell with its darkness, its devouring fires, its eternal despair; and let us think that we have deserved to be cast into it because of our sins.

But in order to excite in ourselves a more perfect sorrow, let us go in spirit to Calvary; let us behold our adorable Savior crucified, crowned with thorns, bleeding, torn by the scourges, enduring every suffering, abandoned by all, not able to obtain even a drop of water to relieve his parching thirst, and dying a most cruel and ignominious death; and let us remember that his sufferings are our work, the work of our sins. How with thoughts like these in our minds can we fail to regret all our offences! How, while weeping over Jesus, can we help weeping over ourselves who cru-

cified him, and entering into the spirit of those words which he addressed to the holy women who compassionated him: *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me; but weep for yourselves and for your children.*[1]

Let us join to sorrow for our sins a firm purpose never more to commit them and to avoid all occasions of sin. Is it not evident that before asking for grace, we should be fully resolved never more to offend him whose clemency we are going to implore? Let us, then, form a sincere resolution to avoid sin and all that might lead to it. Let us put ourselves in the dispositions of the saints, who would willingly have sacrificed their possessions, their health, their life, rather than consent to offend God even venially.

But while we are full of sorrow for our faults, and resolved never to relapse into them, let us also excite ourselves to confidence, remembering what faith teaches us of the goodness, the clemency, and the mercy of God. Whoever we are and whatever our sins may have been, let us open our hearts to hope. All that can be wept for, can be pardoned. Let us, then, exclaim with the penitent saints: *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy.*[2] I am indeed guilty; but the number and enormity of my sins will only make thy clemency appear more striking. *For thy name's sake, O Lord, thou wilt pardon my sin; for it is great.*[3] Take pity on my soul which has cost thee so dear, and which thou hast deigned to purchase with thy blood. It is dead, but if thou wilt place thy hand upon it, it will live. Remember that thou hast said: *I am the resurrection and the life.*[4] O raise my soul to life, and after

[1]Luke xxiii. 28. [2]Ps. l. 3. [3]Ibid. xxiv. 11. [4]John xi. 25.

thou hast, by absolution, restored to me the life of grace, grant that I may never more lose it, but that by it I may merit the life of glory!"

APPLICATION

If we wish to prepare well for the sacrament of penance, let us fervently invoke the Holy Ghost, and implore the assistance of the most Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and our holy angel guardian, that we may be enlightened as to the state of our conscience, and know in what relation we stand to God and his holy law. But let us pray still more earnestly to obtain contrition for our sins, and the disposition never more to commit them.

Let us examine our conscience carefully every day; for nothing so greatly facilitates the examination for confession, which then becomes only a review of what we have already done. A religious should always be ready for confession and for death. God grant that it be so with us!

Let us frequently meditate on the truths most calculated to excite us to contrition: the perfections of God, heaven, purgatory, hell, but, above all, the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be more and more convinced of the goodness of God, and let us entertain the most lively confidence in his mercy. Let us enter into the heart of Jesus, and consider his compassion for us poor sinners and his desire to show us mercy. Let us not yield to fear, for he has merited for us that sanctifying grace which we beg of his heavenly Father, and he takes delight in bestowing it upon us.

Let us train our pupils to prepare well for confession, to make the examination of conscience with care, and to excite in their hearts true contrition and a firm purpose of amendment.

PRAYER

O divine Savior, grant that I may profit by the means of sanctification and salvation which thou hast established, and particularly by the sacrament of penance, which I receive so often. Grant that I may bring to it the necessary dispositions for receiving its full efficacy, and that by it I may be established in thy holy love and persevere to the end therein.

Résumé, page 324.

Let us bring to the reception of the sacrament of penance a fitting preparation. For that purpose:

1. Let us fervently implore the Holy Spirit.
2. Let us carefully examine our conscience.
3. Let us excite ourselves to contrition for our sins.
4. Let us form a firm resolution to avoid them for the time to come and to shun their occasions.
5. Let us renew our confidence in God, remembering that, in his infinite bounty, he ardently desires to pardon us.

—But in order to make this preparation well:

1. Let us pray often to know the state of our conscience.
2. Let us make the daily examination seriously.
3. Let us meditate frequently on the truths best calculated to excite our contrition.
4. Let us be convinced of the goodness of God.
5. Let us enter into the heart of Jesus, consider his compassion toward us poor sinners, and his desire to give us grace.

NINETEENTH MEDITATION

CONTRITION

A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Ps. l. 19.

CONSIDERATION

Let us be well convinced of the necessity of contrition to obtain the pardon of our sins. All the doctors of the Church are unanimous on this point. Contrition, properly so-called, or attrition, is an essential part of the sacrament of penance: nothing can supply its want. There is pardon for every sin only on condition of sorrow and repentance. God, indeed, wishes to forget our faults, but he requires that we sincerely bewail them, and that we be resolved never more to commit them. No, there is no forgiveness without contrition. He who does not heartily bewail his offences need not hope that they will be forgotten by God.

Contrition, to be sincere and capable of reconciling us with heaven, must have certain qualities upon which it is important for us to meditate. Contrition must be *interior,* that is, it must proceed from the heart, from the depths of the soul. It is the heart that has sinned, it is the will that has revolted against God. Consequently the heart must weep, the will must strive to repair the guilt of its hateful rebellion. Mere words on

the lips will not suffice for the validity of this sacrament: it is necessary that the soul really detest its faults, and express its regret in such words as these: "My God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee." Such was the contrition of the royal prophet when he said: *There is no peace for my bones, because of my sins.*[1]

Contrition must be *supernatural;* it must proceed from the Holy Ghost, have God, or what concerns God, for its motive, and to some extent, comprise the love of God. We must regret sin because it offends our Sovereign Lord, outrages his perfections, breaks his law, contemns his authority, and abuses his gifts. We must regret sin because by committing it we have displeased our Father, wounded his heart, and provoked his indignation. We must regret sin because it is a hideous thing, abominable in the sight of God and his angels, and unworthy of the soul which commits it, which it disfigures, impoverishes and dishonors.

We must regret sin because, if it is mortal, it causes us to lose heaven; and, if it is venial, it retards our entrance therein. The soul that is defiled by it cannot be admitted into the abode of supreme felicity. To it is said: "Depart into the flames, there to weep over what thou has not sufficiently wept for, to mourn over what thou hast not sufficiently mourned." Mortal sin opens the abyss of everlasting misery, and casts the soul into it. O my God, how can I help having the most bitter sorrow for having committed it, and committed it so often? It has made me deserving of the devouring fires enkindled by thy justice! It has pre-

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 4.

pared a place for me in those fiery dungeons in which the enemies of thy name are confined forever!

We must regret sin because it has caused the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ. It was our offences against his heavenly Father that made him the victim of expiation, the Man of Sorrows. It was our offences that caused his bitter tears, that occasioned his fatigues, and necessitated the shedding of his blood. How can we think of this without sincerely bewailing sin?

Contrition must be *sovereign*, that is to say, we should be more grieved at the offence against God than at all other misfortunes that could befall us. Is not sin the greatest of evils? Is it not the only real evil? Where then can we find a juster subject for our tears? No, no! there is nothing that deserves to be wept over if we do not weep over this misfortune, to which no other can be compared. Yet this sorrow need not be so sensible as that caused by the accidents of life. Nevertheless it ought to be no less real, and to put our will in a disposition to suffer everything rather than consent to sin.

Contrition must be *universal*, extending rigorously to all our mortal sins without a single exception. All, in fact, are treasons against God, outrages of his perfections; all make us unworthy of heaven and deserving of hell. We must therefore be sorry for them all.

But it should not be enough for a Christian, and much less for a religious, to be contrite for all the mortal sins that he may have committed. He should be sorry also for his venial sins, especially for those which he may have committed deliberately. Are they not all, in fact, offences against God? Do they not all weaken

grace? Do they not dispose to mortal sin? Do they not wound the heart of Jesus? Do they not disfigure the soul? Do they not close heaven against us during all the time that we are stained with them? Why do we not share the sentiments of the saints? What sorrow they felt for venial sins, and what penance they did for them! Yes, let us detest all our sins, and sincerely resolve never more to commit them.

True contrition supposes the firm purpose of never more offending God. He who sincerely repents of his sins, should be resolved never again to fall into them. He does not forget that this life is a perpetual warfare; that in future, as in the past, he will be exposed to violent attacks from the enemy of his salvation; that he carries in himself the germ of the most dangerous temptations. But he knows also that God proportions grace to the dangers of his servants, and that he does not suffer them to be tempted beyond their strength. Therefore, full of confidence, he exclaims: "It is done; I belong to God forever. Strong in the assistance of his grace, I will resist the devil, the world, and the flesh, and will persevere in the state of justice to which I shall be restored by absolution."

APPLICATION

In order to have true contrition, let us employ the means proposed by the masters of the spiritual life. Let us beg of God sincere repentance for our sins. Let us entreat him to give us copious tears to weep over our misfortune in offending him. Let us beseech our Lord to look upon us as he did on St. Peter in the

house of Caiphas, and to make us, like that apostle, sincere penitents.

Let us meditate attentively on the outrage which sin has inflicted on Jesus Christ, our God and our Redeemer. Let us think how much our divine Savior suffered to expiate sin. Let us cast ourselves at the foot of his cross, look upon his wounds, see his blood trickling down, listen to his sighs, and say to ourselves: *Behold my work!*

Let us think of the injury that sin has done to ourselves, and the punishment which it deserves. It degrades and disfigures the soul, it closes heaven, it opens hell, or at least purgatory; it causes much unhappiness in this life, and infinitely more in the next.

Let us form in the depths of our heart a resolution to sin no more. God gives us the grace to do so, let us be faithful to it, and enter resolutely on the right path. Why should we hesitate? Is not this the favorable time? Let us prove this, and after having said with the prodigal son in his repentance, *I will arise and will go to my Father,*[1] let us add: "I will remain with him; nothing on earth or in heaven shall separate me from the love of Jesus Christ."

PRAYER

O Jesus, who will give me to weep for my sins as I ought? My heart cannot regret them enough, and therefore would I wish to have the hearts of all the penitent saints, that I might present to thee such satisfaction as would be pleasing to thee.

[1] Luke xv. 18.

I understand how criminal I have been, and therefore I will never cease to weep at the foot of thy cross. Would that I could there die of grief! I should then die in the very act of paying homage to thy justice, and should thus deserve to experience in the next life the effects of thy infinite mercy.

Résumé, page 325.

In order to receive pardon of our sins, we must have contrition for them, which should be:

1. Interior, proceeding from the heart.
2. Supernatural, produced by the Holy Ghost, having for motive God and the things of God.
3. Sovereign, superior to all other sorrow.
4. Universal, extending absolutely to all mortal sins, extending even to all venial sins.
5. Accompanied by the firm purpose of sinning no more and of avoiding the occasions of sin.

—In order that our contrition may have these qualities:

1. Let us ask that favor of God.
2. Let us meditate on the outrage that sin offers to him.
3. Let us think of what Jesus Christ suffered for sin.
4. Let us think of the evil which sin does to us and the punishment which it deserves.
5. Let us be firmly resolved never more to commit it.

TWENTIETH MEDITATION

THE SENTIMENTS OF A REPENTANT SINNER

Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.—Luke xv. 21.

CONSIDERATION

I have sinned against the Lord.[1] Who will give me tears to bewail my misfortune? I have offended the sovereign King, I have despised his supreme majesty. Dust and ashes, I have revolted against him who is everything; I, a vile creature, have outraged the God whose power is unlimited, who is so great that in comparison with him all creatures together are less than a grain of dust or an atom in comparison with the universe.

I have offended him in his presence, knowing well that he saw me, that he heard me. I have rebelled against him; I have declared war upon him, I have wished to dethrone him. I have caused the spirit of evil whom I have obeyed to reign in my heart in his stead.

I have sinned; I have offended my Father who is in heaven, my Creator, my Benefactor, to whom I owe everything. He has loved me with infinite love, and I have despised him. He has lavished his mercies upon me, and I have answered his benefits by insult. What ingratitude! O how painful this thought is to me!

[1]Kings xii. 13.

My God! how afflicted I am at beholding my baseness! I have been an unnatural child, a parricide; and therefore my brow is covered with shame and my heart is broken with grief.

I have sinned; I have withdrawn from God; I have lost God. What a loss! God alone is my strength, my light, my repose, my consolation, my life; and he has abandoned me. Therefore my soul has languished in darkness, a prey to agitation, unrest, and suffering. My joys have been but a cloak to my sadness. My days have gone by in misery, weariness and desolation.

It was, indeed, very different when I still possessed my innocence! I then saw in thee, O my God, only the most loving of fathers, and not, as now, a stern judge ready to condemn me.

How senseless I have been! I have preferred the creature to the Creator, time to eternity, death to life; and all this in order to obey the devil, to satisfy a guilty inclination, to procure for myself a miserable pleasure! I have resisted the grace, by which God sought to hold me in the way of righteousness. I have acted contrary to the light of my own understanding, contrary to the remorse of my conscience, contrary to the inspiration of my good angel guardian, who said to me: "What art thou about to do? Stop, stop!"

Behold what my conduct has been, and that so frequently that alas! I have every reason to say with David: *My iniquities . . . are multiplied above the hairs of my head.*[1]

I have sinned. O how cruel I have been to Jesus Christ! I have oppressed his most holy soul with a

[1] Ps. xxxix. 13.

sadness *even unto death;* I have caused his tears and his bloody sweat. I have delivered him up to his enemies. With them I have struck him, crowned him with thorns, condemned and crucified him. I have taken my place with the executioners of my divine Savior. I have lacerated his innocent flesh. To relieve his burning thirst I have offered a bitter draught. By my ingratitude I have deeply wounded his heart, the heart that has loved me beyond all measure!

How cruel I have been to Mary, the august co-redemptrix of the human race, the companion of her divine Son in suffering! At the foot of the cross she called to me and to other sinners: *O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow.*[1] And I answered her not, except by adding to the weight of her sorrows. How the remembrance of this malice now grieves me! O Mary, my good Mother, how deeply I regret having caused thee to shed tears, and having pierced thy soul with a sword of sorrow by sinning against thy divine Son!

I have sinned. I have deserted from the camp of Jesus Christ to that of the devil. I have given over into the hands of the enemy of my salvation all my rights to heaven. Another Esau, I have for a miserable gratification surrendered all my titles to my eternal inheritance. O heaven, home of my companions in religion, abode of perfect happiness, I have consented to be deprived of thy joys forever! Thou art closed against me. My eyes are unworthy to behold thy beauties; for I have abandoned to another the place that was reserved for me within thy precincts.

[1] Lam. i. 12.

I have sinned; I have incurred a curse, and it has fallen upon me. I have brought it also upon my relatives and neighbors. By one single sin I have started, as it were, an infinity of evils; and, alas! I have committed almost an infinity of sins. I have sinned. I have desecrated soul and body; I have completed the work of destruction. My soul is a mournful ruin. It is without grace or beauty before the Lord. It is stamped with the shameful seal of the master to whom it surrendered. Whoever looks upon it by the light of faith, sees that it is only a corpse.

O prophet, who didst mourn over the ruins of Jerusalem, weep over my soul which is reduced to the utmost desolation! I have sinned. I have deserved the torments reserved for sinners; I have merited the fire of hell. I am now suspended over that flaming abyss wherein a place is reserved for me. If death were to strike me now, as at this moment it strikes so many other men, what would be my fate? Transported suddenly before thy tribunal, O Sovereign Master, I should hear thee pronounce the sentence of my condemnation, a sufficient cause for the most frightful despair: *Depart,* thou accursed one, *into everlasting fire.*[1]

APPLICATION

Guilty as I am, should I not embrace with ardor the practice of penance? Should I not punish with severity my repeated acts of treason? And yet what is all that I can do compared to what my sins deserve? Though, to satisfy the justice of my God, I should

[1]Matt. xxv. 41.

shed as many tears of blood as there are drops of water in the sea, what satisfaction would I thereby offer and what proportion would it bear to the guilt of my sins?

With the assistance of grace I will keep my sins continually before my eyes, and strive to keep myself in sentiments of the profoundest confusion and humility. I will recall the number and grievousness of my offences, and will never cease to bewail them, and ask pardon for them from God. I will bewail them from the bottom of my heart. With the penitent saints I will be inconsolable for having offended the God whom I love.

In order to satisfy his justice I will accept with joy all the trials to which his Providence will subject me, and I will mortify my inclinations and my senses as far as I may be permitted to do so. Above all, I will never more commit sin, and will carefully avoid its occasions.

By acting thus I shall be restored to grace, and God will be merciful to me. He is a loving Father, and he would have us bewail our wanderings. But he himself will dry our tears, restore our innocence, re-establish us in his holy love and in all the rights we had lost by sin.

PRAYER

O Jesus, merciful Savior, look down with compassion upon me. I have sinned, but I repent of it. Behold my tears, and take pity on me. For thy name's sake, pardon thy repentant servant. Remember that thou art my Savior, and save me. Grant that by repairing

the wrongs of my past life I may give as much joy to thy Sacred Heart as I have hitherto caused it grief and suffering.

I ask this favor of thee through the intercession of thy most holy Mother, whom I invoke in the language of the Church: *Refuge of sinners; pray for us.* I beg it of thee also through the intercession of my holy angel guardian, who has been the witness of all my sins and of my resistance to divine grace.

Résumé, page 325.

I have sinned. O what a subject of sorrow!

1. I have offended God, I have insulted my Father!
2. I have separated myself from God, my only good!
3. I have saddened Jesus! I have wounded his heart!

O unfortunate wretch! I have joined his executioners to scourge him, to crown him with thorns, to crucify him!

4. I have given over to the devil my rights to heaven. If death were to come upon me, I should be cast into hell.
5. I have become loathsome in the sight of God.

Have I not drawn down his curse on my relatives?

—Let me, then, be a true penitent:

1. Having my sins constantly before my eyes.
2. Recalling to mind their number and their magnitude.
3. Regretting them from the bottom of my heart.
4. Punishing myself for having committed them.
5. Never committing them any more, and carefully avoiding their occasions.

TWENTY-FIRST MEDITATION

QUALITIES OF CONFESSION

Go, show thyself to the priest.—Matt. viii. 4.

CONSIDERATION

To be good and profitable, confession must have the requisite qualities; that is to say, it must be humble, simple, prudent, and entire. Let us meditate on each of these qualities.

Confession should be *humble*. We must accuse ourselves of our faults with sentiments of confusion and a consciousness of our guilt. Our sins are hideous wounds in the soul and should naturally produce shame. Let us humble ourselves, then, as we show them to our physician, and let us testify as well as we can how great is our spiritual misery.

Our accusation should not be made through routine or habit, but with a truly contrite heart, a heart grieved at its infidelities, a heart that feels the wrong which it has done to its Sovereign Master, and comes to him to ask forgiveness. Let us accuse ourselves with the conviction that we are wretched creatures, unworthy of the pardon which we ask, and deserving only the vengeance of heaven. Let us put ourselves in the dispositions of the penitent saints who, with their sins massed before their eyes, begged the prayers of men and implored with tears the mercy of God.

Let us be on our guard against pride. If this senti-

ment should ever be far from our souls, it is surely when we come to confess our sins, which are so humiliating for us as men, as Christians, and as religious. Let us trample self-love beneath our feet when it seeks to hide our faults even from ourselves. Let us remember that we have come to accuse, not excuse, ourselves. It is not vanity, but hatred of ourselves, and our faults, that should then reign in our souls.

Confession should be *simple*. Let us carefully examine ourselves in God's presence, and then make ourselves known to the confessor as we are known to ourselves. Let there be no ambiguity, no concealment, no evasion in our accusation. Let us mention with frankness whatever our conscience makes a subject of reproach. Let us exaggerate nothing, and with still more reason, let us extenuate nothing.

Confession should be *prudent*. Let us accuse ourselves in becoming words, in words that bear witness to our respect for the minister of Jesus Christ to whom we address ourselves. Let us not reveal the faults of another without necessity; for it is of ourselves that we should speak, not of our neighbor, unless the latter condition be indispensable to the integrity of the confession.

Confession should be *entire*. When there is question of mortal sins, we are bound to confess all that we know after making a serious examination of conscience, and to accuse ourselves of them with all the circumstances that might change their species. Hence, in mentioning certain sins, it is necessary to make known whether we have taken religious vows. In many cases, too, it may be necessary to state whether we have been

an occasion of scandal to our community, our pupils, or any other persons.

Let us always be most sincere in our confessions. We are guilty; let us then frankly avow it; it is of sin that we should be ashamed, and not of the confession that we make of it. Let us be on our guard against the stratagems of the devil, who draws upon all his resources to make us conceal or disguise our faults, knowing that nothing can work us greater injury.

Let us put away all confusion, all shame in regard to our confessor. Let us absolutely overcome our repugnance and reject from the beginning all apprehension as to what he may think of us. What does it matter what he will think of us? We should now be concerned, not about the good or bad opinion that man may have of us, but simply about effecting our reconciliation with God. The confessor is there to hear us, whatever be our accusation. He is there to advise and absolve us. The frank and sincere declaration of our sins, however great they may be, will win his esteem. When God pardons us and restores us to favor, how can his minister remember the faults of which he was made the depository? The fear that he may recall them, is a dangerous suggestion of the devil which we must repel and against which we must put our pupils on their guard. It is a stratagem to which the spirit of lies resorts to cause us trouble and provoke the greatest disorders. Concealment leads infallibly to uneasiness and remorse, and if the sin withheld be mortal, the confession becomes sacrilegious.

O what a misfortune it is to make a sacrilegious con-

fession, and thereby profane the blood of Jesus Christ, the victim for our sins! Alas! this crime is followed by a sacrilegious communion, which may so easily be the forerunner of our eternal ruin!

Let our confessions, then, be entire. Let us cultivate the sentiments of David, saying: *I have acknowledged my sins to thee, and my injustice I have not concealed,* and with him we shall be able to add: *And thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin.*[1]

Let us, in confession, avoid certain faults that would be attended with evil consequences; such faults, for example, as: 1. Not to accuse ourselves of sins when we are not certain that they are only venial; 2. To accuse ourselves of venial sins without being sorry for them; it would be far more useful to confess only one venial sin provided we were truly sorry for it and wished to correct it, than to mention a great number in regard to which we had not these dispositions; 3. To give way to scruples, always being afraid that we had not expressed ourselves with sufficient clearness or had not had proper contrition; 4. To be engaged in searching our memory for forgotten sins, instead of listening with attention to the advice of our confessor. On all these points let us follow exactly the directions given us, and we shall thus draw from this sacrament all the fruits which it ought to produce in our souls.

APPLICATION

Let us carefully study the doctrine of the Church on the sacrament of penance, that we may know well our

[1]Ps. xxxi. 5.

obligations on that head. Let us form a just appreciation of the office of the priest in the holy tribunal. To this end let us contemplate it from the standpoint of faith. Let us behold, in the minister of the sacrament, Jesus Christ himself, who knows the interior of our souls, and who is willing to pardon us if we confess our sins with sincere and contrite hearts.

Let us be zealous in training our pupils to make good confessions. Let us inspire their minds with the greatest horror of concealment. But let us first of all put in practice the lessons which we give them. Let us bear in mind that if it be painful to confess our guilt at the holy tribunal, surely the grace of reconciliation which we hope to obtain deserves that we should make this sacrifice with a generous heart.

Let us be thoroughly convinced that the shame of accusing ourselves to a priest who is bound to the most inviolable secrecy, is not to be compared with that which we shall feel on the last day, when we are known as guilty before Jesus Christ the Sovereign Judge, and before the whole universe. He who wishes to spare himself the first humiliation, consents to incur the second! There is only one way of preventing this awful final manifestation, and that is to confess our sins sincerely and do penance for them.

Let us think of the anguish of many now in hell, who could be already in heaven if they had courageously confessed their sins. How bitterly do they now deplore that criminal silence to which they trace back all their miseries! When shipwrecked, a plank was offered them, and in the place of seizing it they suffered themselves to be buried beneath the waves!

And now all is lost! Let their misfortune instruct us and nerve us to brave everything to avoid the like end.

PRAYER

O sweet Savior, take pity on me who am, alas! subject to so many miseries. I have recourse to thee, heavenly Physician of my soul, to be cured of my spiritual maladies. I am about to make use of one of the salutary remedies which thou hast prepared for me. O grant that it may work all its effects in me, and that by it my soul may recover life, health, and strength! This I beg of thee, by the wound in thy Sacred Heart and by the intercession of all the penitent saints with whom I hope one day to celebrate thy infinite mercies in heaven.

Résumé, page 326.

It is necessary that our confessions be:

1. Humble, made with sorrow and confusion.
2. Simple, being confined to our sins as we know them.
3. Prudent, respectful, decorous.
4. Entire; comprising, at least, mortal sins, with all their aggravating circumstances.
5. Conformable to the direction given us.

—That our confessions may have these qualities, it is necessary:

1. To know well what relates to the sacrament of penance.
2. To form a just idea of the ministry of the priest in the holy tribunal.
3. To be seized with horror at the very idea of a sacrilegious confession.
4. To think of the regrets of so many of the damned, who deplore not having had courage to confess their crimes.
5. To reflect that on the last day the sins hidden in confession shall be unveiled before the eyes of the whole world.

TWENTY-SECOND MEDITATION

SATISFACTION

Owe no man anything.—Rom. xiii. 8.

CONSIDERATION

Although absolution remits the eternal punishment due to sin, there generally remains a temporal punishment which the sinner must undergo to repair the injury done to God, and there may be also the duty of repairing the injury done to his neighbor. This double reparation is called satisfaction. It consists principally in the penance imposed by the confessor, which, as far at least as the disposition of performing it is concerned, is an essential part of the sacrament. Let us accept it willingly, and always perform it promptly, exactly and piously.

And what is this penance if compared with our deserts? Let us think of the greatness of God, whom we have outraged, the severity of his judgments, and the punishment endured in hell by the unhappy victims of his justice. O how trifling is the punishment inflicted upon us, and from how many torments does it not deliver us!

Let us reflect on what Jesus suffered to atone for our sins. Would we wish him to complain of us: *I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but*

there was none;[1] *I have trodden the winepress alone?*[2] He who is innocent takes upon himself the burden that we ought to bear, and we who are guilty are unwilling to share it with him!

Let us not content ourselves with the penance imposed by our confessor, for we should then prove that we did not appreciate the grievousness of our faults, nor the reparation which they require; but let us add other works in satisfaction for our sins. Is it not thus that all the saints have acted? What severities did they not practise upon themselves! How they crucified their flesh, contradicted their inclinations, and vigorously combatted their passions! What tears did they not shed at the remembrance of their sins, and with what sentiments of compunction did they not present themselves before God, to implore his mercy!

Let us call to mind the life of the holy anchorites, St. Anthony, St. Hilarion, St. Bessarion, St. Jerome, and so many others whose penitential austerities appear almost incredible. O how their example reproaches our cowardice! What do we do that in any way approaches their conduct? And yet, have we not more grounds than they to grieve over the past?

In imitation of their example, and in union with Jesus Christ, through whom alone our works of satisfaction have merit before God, let us practise works of penance, the principal of which are prayer, mortification of our senses, mortification of our inclinations, labor, obedience to our rules, and the giving of edification. Let us pray that we may find grace before the God whom we have offended; let us implore his mercy

[1]Ps. lxvii. 21. [2]Isai. lxiii. 3.

without ceasing. When assisting at the holy sacrifice of Mass, let us ask forgiveness through the adorable Victim who mystically offers upon the altar, in sacrifice for our sins, that redeeming blood which he once shed upon Mount Calvary, and which, unlike that of Abel, rises to heaven only to ask for mercy.

Let us mortify our senses, for they have been the instruments of sin, which always begins in them. They have served the purposes of sin; let us then punish them. Let us impose the most watchful modesty upon our eyes, whose wandering glances have been so fatal to us. Let us mortify our palate, by which we have so often gratified our sensuality. Let us close our ears to vain or idle conversation, since we have so often used them to listen to language that was blameable, perhaps even licentious. Let us in all circumstances combat our love of ease, our delicacy, and the inclinations of the flesh, to which we have already granted too much indulgence, and which, unless checked, would draw us into a course full of dangers and leading ultimately to the abyss of evil.

Let us mortify our mind in all its faculties, remembering that all of them have been used against God. Let us control our imagination, which has called up before us so many dangerous images. Let us bring our memory under control that it may recall holy thoughts and salutary recollections. Let us employ our understanding to study our duties and not to gratify our curiosity. Let us sacrifice our self-love; let us learn to renounce our own will and be subject to that of another. Let us keep ourselves in sentiments of profound humility, and striking our breasts, say with the publican

in the Gospel: *O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*[1] Let us mortify our heart, curbing its inclinations and opposing it unceasingly. Let us love creatures only in God and for God. Let us have no other sentiments than those of the adorable heart of Jesus. Then we shall satisfy for whatever may have been vicious or too natural in our affections.

Let us perform in the spirit of faith, courage, and constancy, the duties entrusted to us, remembering that in consequence of man's first sin was the sentence pronounced: *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.*[2] Let us accept with resignation the trials and afflictions of life which in the views of Providence are most precious opportunities for satisfying the justice of God. In our trials let us say with St. Augustine: "O Lord, strike, burn and cut in this life, but pardon me, and spare me in eternity."

Let us faithfully observe our rules: for us religious they are the true means of expiating our faults, the means which include all others, and which no others can supply. Let us subject ourselves to a regular life, and appreciate most highly those practices that are most repugnant, most painful to nature. Let us never forget that we have assumed a penitential habit, and that our life should be one of trial and sacrifice.

Let us always give good example, that we may repair our sins of scandal. Let us edify our community, our pupils, and strangers. Nothing will give better proof that we belong wholly to God, and that we now have at heart to procure him as much glory as we formerly brought dishonor on his perfections by our offences.

[1]Luke xviii. 13. [2]Gen. iii. 19.

How advantageous it will be to us to follow this course of conduct, by which we shall acquit ourselves in this world of what we owe to God's justice, and shall merit to experience in the next only the effects of his mercy and generosity!

APPLICATION

Let us keep ourselves in the spirit of penance. For this purpose let us often reflect on what divine Justice has a right to exact from us. Let us meditate on the sufferings which in the next life are *the wages of sin,* and let us compare with them what we have to suffer in our state and what we can add thereto. Let us then ask ourselves, what is all this when compared with what the souls in purgatory endure? What is it when compared with the sufferings of the damned?

Let us contract the holy habit of offering our actions to God, and of accepting our trials in satisfaction for our sins. Let us endeavor to gain as often as possible the indulgences granted by the Church. Perhaps, alas! we have been negligent in this respect. How little we realize our own interest, and how greatly we will one day lament that we did not draw freely from this spiritual treasure, by which we could so easily have discharged our debts to God! Let us think of the regret of the soul which, after having acted as we act, appears before the Sovereign Judge and hears his decision: "Go into the fires that are the just punishment for thy sins, from which *thou shalt not go out . . . till thou pay the last farthing.*[1]

[1]Matt. v. 26.

PRAYER

I adore thee, O Jesus, spotless Victim, who didst expiate our sins by thy sufferings and death upon the cross. O grant that, in union with thee, I may atone for all the sins I have had the misfortune to commit! Give me, I beg of thee, a spirit of true penance, which, taking the part of divine justice against myself, may move me to pass my days and nights in sorrow and tears, and may merit for me thy mercy in the life to come.

Résumé, page 326.

Let us call to mind in what satisfaction consists.

Let us each time perform our penance promptly, exactly, and piously.

But as it is nothing compared to what our sins deserve, let us add to it other works of satisfaction:

1. Prayer, assisting at the holy sacrifice.
2. Fasting, mortification of the senses.
3. Interior mortification.
4. Labor with a view to offer satisfaction to God.
5. Resignation in our trials, fidelity to our Rules.

—Let us make it a practice:

1. To think often of what we owe to divine justice.
2. To compare the expiations of the other life with those which are prescribed in this.
3. To offer our actions to God in a spirit of penance.
4. To bless him in all our pains and trials.
5. To endeavor to gain indulgences either for ourselves or for the souls in purgatory.

TWENTY-THIRD MEDITATION

AVOIDING THE OCCASIONS OF SIN

If thy right eye cause thee to offend, pluck it out and cast it from thee.—Matt. v. 29.

CONSIDERATION

It is not sufficient to wish to avoid sin, we must also be resolved to avoid its occasions, at every cost. Without this disposition we have no true and firm purpose of amendment.

He who says: "I hate sin, but I do not hate its occasions." is deceiving himself. He has no wish to get well who continues to use the food that made him sick. He has no real desire to retain his liberty who imprudently goes into the midst of his enemies. He who throws himself into the fire gives ample proof of his desire to burn. Indeed, to take pleasure in and seek after the occasions of sin is really to take pleasure in and seek after sin itself. Let us then shun such occasions with the greatest care. Every consideration makes this a duty for us.

In the first place, it is the command of Jesus Christ. Does he not say, in fact: *If thy right eye cause thee to offend, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish, than that thy whole body should be cast into hell.* And

he continues: *And if thy right hand cause thee to offend, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish, than that thy whole body should go into hell.*[1] What could be more explicit? If we are disciples of Christ and wish to obey him, we must then withdraw from the occasions of sin, however much it may cost nature to do so.

The Holy Ghost lays the same command upon us in several passages of Holy Scripture. Thus he speaks in the book of Ecclesiasticus: *He that loves the danger shall perish in it.*[2] And in another place he says: *He that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.*[3] Woe, then, to the imprudent man who throws himself into the occasion of sin! He loves the danger, he will perish in it; he breaks down the hedge, he will be bitten by the infernal serpent. How he will one day deplore his rashness!

God gives us, in superabundance, grace to avoid dangerous occasions; but if we resist that grace, if we wilfully go into the danger, will he give us in superabundance the grace that will then be necessary? And even if he does give it, will we make it efficacious since we have already failed to correspond to the preceding grace? Let us call to mind what is written: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*[4] Now, to throw oneself into the danger, presuming on divine assistance, is tempting God.

No, no! let us not play with the fire; let us dread what has been a cause of temptation to us. Above all, let us fear when we are not following the path of

[1]Matt. v. 29, 30. [2]Ecclus. iii. 27. [3]Ibid. x. 8.
[4]Matt. iv. 7.

obedience, when our superiors know not where we are, what we are doing, and with whom we are conversing. Let us listen to the admonition of our good angel who whispers to our conscience: "Take care, you are exposing yourself; turn back, for this road leads to ruin." How many falls, alas! have been ours because we have not followed his inspirations! Let us, then, profit by our own experience.

Let us understand how great is our weakness, and how powerful are our inclinations to evil! When removed from the occasions of offending God, we think we can triumph over the enemy of our salvation, and we say to our Lord, with St. Peter: *Though all men shall be scandalized in thee, I will never be scandalized.*[1] *I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death.*[2] But when the occasion comes, our apparent strength vanishes: the soul is agitated, the devil pushes it to the brink of the precipice, and it topples over.

That is what has happened to us, and that is what will happen again if we take the same risks. We have not more strength to resist our passions than had the holy king David, and yet a dangerous occasion proved fatal to him. We are not wiser than Solomon, yet occasions of sin ruined him! We are not more courageous than St. Peter, and yet, when the dangerous occasion arose, he denied his Master at the voice of a servant maid. How many persons of distinguished piety have fallen into the abyss of iniquity! If we go back to the source, we shall find that it was because they imprudently entered an occasion of offending God.

Let their fall instruct us, and make us watchful over

[1]Matt. xxvi. 33. [2]Luke xxii. 33.

our conduct. Their misfortune may become ours if we act like them; "for," says St. Augustine, "there is no sin that one man has committed that another may not commit." "Watch over yourselves at all times, and in all places," says St. Syncletica, "and reckon not so much upon your past virtue as to expose yourselves imprudently to the dangerous occasions of sin. There have been solitaries who, after having triumphed over the devil by repelling assaults of every kind, have been vanquished by exposing themselves to temptations under pretext of piety. The enemy caught them, as birds are taken by grains of wheat laid in a snare."

All the doctors of the Church teach that avoiding the occasions of sin is a necessary means to avoid sin itself, and that to go into the proximate occasion of sin is itself an offence against God, and in some circumstances a very grievous one.

APPLICATION

Fully convinced of the necessity of avoiding dangerous occasions, let us give an account to ourselves of all we meet. Let us examine what may be hurtful to us by leading us into evil. Let us reflect on the injunctions contained in our rules, which manifest a prudence truly supernatural. Let us bear in mind the urgency with which our holy Founder recommends us to have no intimacy with externs, to refrain from touching children, and to avoid all undue familiarity. It was because he knew the danger to which we should be exposed if we forgot these important points.

Let us be guided by the director of our conscience

when he warns us that such a thing is a source of danger to us. He knows us; he knows our tendencies, the nature of our temptations, and consequently what might be hurtful to our souls. When we, too, know that any circumstances are occasions of sin, or even of temptation, let us carefully avoid them; let us withdraw far from them without delay. Let us not, however, fall into scruples; neither let us form a false or rash conscience.

Let us make the examen of foresight usual among us, and faithfully keep the resolutions adopted in it. Let us watch over our senses, and particularly over our eyes. Like Job, let us make a covenant with our eyes, so as to have no bad thoughts. Let us avoid worldly society, strictly observing the prescriptions of our rules on this point. O how many falls regularity will prevent! How many persons there are who have left religion, and who would have been a glory to it, if they had avoided worldly society as their superiors had recommended!

Let us watch over our heart and distrust its affections, which may expose us to great danger. Our nature inclines us to evil. Everything around is a snare to us; to fail in vigilance would mean ruin. Let us, then, be prudent as serpents, as Jesus Christ counsels. Let us courageously cast away from us whatever might lead us to evil. What matters the opinion of men? It is not a question of their opinion, but of our salvation.

PRAYER

O Jesus, who commandest us to avoid all occasions of sin to us, grant me, I beseech thee, the grace to

correspond faithfully and courageously to all thy wishes. Give me the spirit of fortitude and prudence, so that avoiding the snares of the enemy, I may constantly advance in the path of justice until I come to thee, in whom I shall find my recompense for eternity.

Résumé, page 327.

It is not enough to wish to avoid sin, it is necessary to shun its occasions.

1. Jesus Christ commands us to withdraw from everything that might be an occasion of sin.

2. The Holy Ghost has said: "He who loves the danger shall perish in it."

3. We have in superabundance the grace to avoid the occasion; but if we expose ourselves to it, shall we then have the grace not to sin?

4. What does experience tell us on this subject?

5. All the Doctors of the Church teach that flight from dangerous occasions is the indispensable means of avoiding sin.

—It is necessary, then:

1. To enlighten ourselves on what is for us an occasion of offending God.

2. To avoid it resolutely and at any cost.

3. To make ourselves well known to our spiritual director, and faithfully follow his advice.

4. To watch over our senses, to shun the world.

5. To watch over our heart, remembering that natural affection is, alas! very near to criminal affection.

TWENTY-FOURTH MEDITATION

NECESSITY AND QUALITIES OF CONVERSION

Be converted . . . with all your heart.—Joel ii. 12.

CONSIDERATION

Let us be converted; let us be renewed in spirit. Let us return to the path of virtue, the only one that we should follow, the only one that leads to happiness. If we have been going to the left, let us turn to the right: God himself commands us to do so. Let us hearken to his voice in Holy Scripture: *Turn to the Lord, and forsake thy sins.*[1] *Let men turn every one from his evil way, and from the iniquity that is in their hands*[2]. *Be penitent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*[3] *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For his wrath shall come on a sudden; and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.*[4]

No, no! let us not delay; let us be converted at once. God now gives us the grace; but who knows that he will give it to-morrow, or at least that he will give it in the same abundance? Who knows that there will be a morrow for us? Who knows that we shall then wish to be converted? We are masters neither of grace nor

[1]Ecclus. xvii. 21. [2]Jonas iii. 8. [3]Acts iii. 19.
[4]Ecclus. v. 8, 9.

of time; we cannot be sure of our future dispositions. What, then, can justify us in putting off our return to God?

To-day we hear the voice of grace; let us, then, not harden our hearts. Since the circumstances are favorable, let us eagerly take advantage of them: perhaps if we delay they will not present themselves again, and our ruin will be complete. God has promised forgiveness to repentance, but he has not promised us another day in which to do penance. Let us reflect on this; and take care not to put off till to-morrow what we should do to-day. O imprudence, O guilt of deferring one's conversion! To do so, is to risk one's eternal happiness, to give proof of love for sin, to despise the Lord and his graces, to sleep on the brink of the abyss of hell, into which death may precipitate one at any moment.

We say that we hate sin; why then do we suffer it to remain in us? We say that we wish to belong wholly to God; why then not belong to him at once? Does not the putting off of our conversion mean that we wish to give him only the dregs of our life? Is it not tantamount to casting in the face of the Sovereign Lord of all things the insolent statement that he does not deserve the consecration of our whole being? It is a most odious blasphemy in act, even though it be not formulated in words.

To defer our conversion is to presume that the patience and goodness of God will suffer us to continue to offend him. O how much reason has he not to say to us: *Is thy eye evil, because I am good?*[1] or in the language of St. Paul: *Despisest thou the riches of his*

[1] Matt. xx. 15.

goodness, and patience and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?[1] What an abuse of the clemency of God to make use of it to strengthen ourselves in iniquity!

No, no! let us not defer our conversion. How little time is left us to repair the evil that we have done, and to accomplish the good that we ought to do! Behold with what frightful rapidity life flits by; our career is drawing to a close; death is within a few paces of us. How can we hesitate to traverse the short distance that leads to heaven! Let us be converted in heart, and not merely in words. It was the heart that gave birth to sin, and it is the heart that must destroy it. It is with the heart that we strayed away from God, and it is with the heart that we must return to him.

We must love what we have hated, and hate what we have loved. The detestation of sin, the horror of sin, should know no limit in our souls. Let us remember what the Lord says to us by the prophet Joel: *Be converted to me with all your heart . . . rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy.*[2]

Let us be converted not only in heart but in deed. We have given scandal, we must give edification. We have been seen travelling on the road to perdition, we must now be found advancing in the way of salvation. Moreover, the dispositions of the heart are necessarily translated into action. If we are sincerely converted we shall prove it by the faithful observance of our rules,

[1]Rom. ii. 4. [2]Joel ii. 12, 13.

by our modesty, by avoiding the occasions of sin, by abandoning everything that could be a source of temptation to us.

Let us be converted forever. Let us enter on the right path, and never abandon it. The motives that we have to avoid sin to-day are motives for avoiding it to-morrow and every day of our life. We return to God because he is good, because sin displeases us, and because we wish to save our souls. But God is always good, sin is always hateful, and we should always wish the salvation of our souls. We should, then, abandon sin forever.

Why should we return again to the vomit? Why, after having been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb, should we again wallow in the filth of iniquity? What an abuse of grace! What an insult to Jesus Christ! No, no; let us not again be guilty. After having returned to our heavenly Father, let us remain faithful to him till death.

APPLICATION

Let us ask God for the grace of true conversion, for conversion of heart and of exterior and interior conduct. Let us ask it of him through the intercession of the penitent saints, those courageous souls who, after having had the misfortune to offend him, returned to him, never more to be separated from him.

Let us faithfully correspond to this grace; let us sin no more. Let us flee from the camp of the devil and put ourselves under the standard of the cross, by the

side of our divine Leader. Let us give heed to him as he calls upon us to fight with him against the enemies of our salvation, and to share in the glory of his triumph. Let us reflect on the shortness of life, the uncertainty of the future, the proximity of death; and take care not to put off to the future what we should do now.

Let us listen to Jesus Christ urging us to make our salvation sure, telling us that he will come at an hour when we shall least expect him, that he will surprise us as the waters of the deluge surprised the men of that day, as the fire from heaven surprised the inhabitants of Sodom. Let us repudiate the sentiments of the rich man of the Gospel, who said to himself: *Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer. But God said to him: Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee.*[1] O what a misfortune if, when he will demand ours, he shall find it still entangled in the meshes of sin. Let us think of this and prevent it.

Let us listen to Mary, our good Mother in heaven, urging us to be converted, entreating us to apply the merits of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to our souls, to give joy to his divine heart by a sincere return to virtue, and thus to procure for herself the greatest satisfaction which she can receive from our hands. Let us listen to the Church also which never ceases to call upon us in a thousand ways to abandon sin, to return to God, and persevere in his holy grace, which alone can gain for us admission into the abode of the blessed.

[1] Luke xii. 19, 20.

PRAYER

O my God, how shall I say *to-morrow?* Why not be converted to-day, at this very instant, since thou givest me the grace requisite? Yes, be it so. Behold, O Lord, I am thine, wholly thine, and forever. Like Saul, when thrown to the ground on the road to Damascus, I say to thee: *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*[1] And like him, I will always be disposed to say: *Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*[2] Amen.

Résumé, page 327.

Let us be converted:

1. Really, quitting sin altogether.
2. Promptly, without any delay.
3. Heartily, hating sin, and loving only God.
4. In deed, acting henceforth as true religious, faithfully observing our Rules, shunning the occasions of sin.
5. Forever, remaining faithful till death.

—For this purpose:

1. Let us ask grace of God.
2. Let us correspond with it faithfully and courageously.
3. Let us think of the shortness of life, the uncertainty of the future, the nearness of death.
4. Let us give ear to Jesus Christ, who is eager to secure our salvation and apply to us the merits of his sacrifice.
5. Let us hearken to Mary, let us hear the Church telling us: "Delay not to be converted to the Lord."

[1]Acts ix. 6. [2]Rom. viii. 39.

THE END

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Meditations on our last
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